HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Jesuit Educational Center for Human Development

A Formula for Grieving

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Science Explores Happiness

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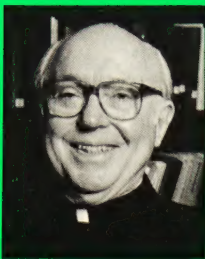**The Comforts of Type B Christianity**

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The editors are pleased to consider for publication articles relating to the ongoing work of those involved in helping other people through religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, and counseling.

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EDITOR'S PAGE

SEARCHING FOR SOURCES OF HAPPINESS

Happiness is a hot topic among research psychologists these days. For the time being, at least, many of them have turned their attention away from depression, anxiety, and stress, in order to explore the experiences of happy people whose lives are sprinkled liberally with seasons of fulfillment, satisfaction, and joy. "Researchers have discovered," says California psychologist Alan Epstein, "that happiness is not external; it is not a function of what one does or does not do." As he explains, "happiness is the *attitude* that one brings to everything that one does. One, in effect, creates happiness."

Among the latest discoveries by psychologists in relation to human happiness is the connection between a person's emotional state and his or her genetic makeup. *New York Times* columnist Daniel Goleman reports that researchers have found that "happiness seems to be largely determined by the genes, not by outside reality. However tragic or comic life's ups and downs, people appear to return inexorably to whatever happiness level is preset in their constitution." The theory supporting this conclusion includes a belief that individuals are born with a "set point" for happiness—"a genetically determined mood level that the vagaries of life may nudge upward or downward, but only for a while," Goleman writes. "With time," he adds, "the grouchy tend to become as cranky as before, and the lighthearted cheery again."

The set-point mechanism is similar to the one that keeps an individual's weight at a fairly constant level, despite temporary increases or decreases. It also works like the internal device that automatically brings your body temperature back to "normal" after a fever or chill temporarily alters it.

The idea of a biological factor establishing one's usual level of happiness is supported by the studies of Dr. David T. Lykken, a behavioral geneticist at the University of Minnesota. In a recent issue of *Psycho-logical Science,* Lykken writes that "about half of your sense of well-being is determined by your set point, which is from the genetic lottery, and the other half from the sorrows and pleasures of the last hours, days, or weeks." Studying 1,500 pairs of twins, Lykken found that people in prestigious positions or professions were not happier than workers in overalls; neither were holders of doctoral degrees happier than those who had never completed eighth grade.

Further confirmation of the set-point theory comes from psychologist Robert R. McCrae, whose research is conducted at the National Institute on Aging. He and his colleagues monitored reports of well-being from nearly 6,000 women and men during a ten-year period. McCrae says, "We find that the people who are relatively happiest now will be the happiest ten years from now, despite the day-to-day fluctuations."

It appears that the amount of dopamine found in each individual's brain is responsible for his or her general level of happiness. Dr. Richard Depue of Cornell University discovered that "the higher people's level of dopamine, the more positive their feelings." And one's normal level of dopamine is ultimately dictated by one's genes.

Despite these strong arguments for the belief that one's ordinary level of happiness can be explained in terms of genetics and biochemistry, it would be wise to wait a while before accepting the theory and concluding that if you are not very happy most of the time, your genes are responsible and there is nothing you can do to change the situation. In the past, genetic explanations have been prematurely offered by researchers and hyped by the news media in relation to a host of conditions and behaviors, including breast cancer, intelligence, alcoholism, obesity, schizophrenia, homosexuality, manic depression, antisocial behavior, conservatism, and even television viewing. Later investigations showed that most of the original research claims were erroneous, but the media have paid little if any attention to the follow-up studies. The same pattern is likely to apply to research on biology's influence on people's abundance or shortage of happiness.
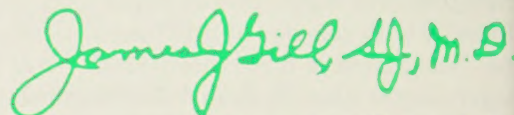
Understandably, many people welcome an "it's-your-genes" explanation for conditions or behaviors they can't or don't want to eradicate; it can drive off feelings of guilt they might be inclined to experience. But it is risky to accept unquestioningly a misleading research report that implicitly discourages attempts to change a condition that may be difficult to modify but that can, with effort, be corrected. For example, an adolescent boy, believing he is genetically destined to become an alcoholic, may repeatedly drink to excess, thinking, "There's no use setting a limit; I've got the genes of an alcoholic." This may result in what psychologists describe as a "self-fulfilling prophecy": by habitually drinking too much, he may indeed become addicted. Once he has become an alcoholic, he may explain away his moral duty to strive for sobriety by blaming the genes he thinks are responsible for his addiction.

Regarding happiness (*contentment* might be a better term for what psychologists are currently investigating): countless people who had believed for years that life would never be enjoyable and fulfilling have found at long last someone to love them, a job that suits them, or a church that gives a lift to their heart. We all know chronically unhappy individuals who have "come to life" in such ways. All of us need to devise comparable strategies to boost our own spirits when we're feeling down, if we don't want to stay miserable and spoil the days of those with whom we reside and work.

To live happily, we have to discover and include regularly in our life the things that can heighten our level of enjoyment. It may take music, sports, theater, travel, time with friends, liturgy, reading, bird watching, or stargazing to achieve this. I suggest especially that we all carefully review and continue to engage in the activities we've found capable of keeping us from sliding into a state of boredom, restlessness, or discontent.

Saint Paul, inspired by God, told us that we should continually rejoice. And Jesus said it was his hope and prayer that we would share his own joy, now and forever. But if you still find it hard to maintain your happiness, even while knowing that you are constantly and infinitely loved by God and that a promised home with endless bliss awaits you in Heaven, you might want to follow the example of lexicographer Barbara Ann Kipfer. She wrote a book titled *14,000 Things to Be Happy About*. Try compiling such a list of your own!

James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.
Editor-in-Chief

Dimensions
of
Human Relationship

Katherine M. Clarke, Ph.D.

Yearning for relationship is at the heart of being human. From the beginning to the end of life, we need and want one another. But what is it that we need and want *of* one another? What are we seeking in our efforts to connect with others? What does it mean to be in relationship? Much of our work in ministry centers on issues of relationship, but we are not always clear on what relationship means.

When people speak of their yearning for relationship, we hear different stories. Elizabeth, a woman religious working in a parish, talks about her loneliness. She feels that there is just nobody *there* for her. Bouts of anxiety make her feel as if she is falling through space. Her attempts to reach out to the busy members of her household seem to come to naught.

Ramon, new to the United States, talks to his pastor about how lost he feels in this country. Nobody knows that he used to be a successful doctor in his homeland. He misses feeling like a skilled professional and helping people.

George talks to his spiritual director about how much he admires his pastor, how he wants to be like him and follow in his footsteps. However, he is in love with a woman in his scripture class and doesn't know if he wants a celibate life.

Madeleine speaks of the pleasure she experiences in being on the campus ministry team and working so well with the rest of the staff. Eyes sparkling, she recounts the Easter liturgies and the joy she has found in what her team has been able to create, together with members of the community.

All these people are talking about relationship, but they are describing different dimensions of relatedness. Elizabeth seeks holding and attachment. Ramon yearns for eye-to-eye validation, embeddedness, and the opportunity to tend and care. George is describing one relationship filled with idealization and identification, and another pulsing with passionate experience. Madeleine is delighting in a relationship of mutuality and the experience of resonance.

Whereas traditional developmental psychology emphasized separation, individuation, and autonomy, recent theories have given us a stronger appreciation of the importance of relationship and interdependence. However, most writers emphasize only one particular strand of relatedness and discuss how it develops in early childhood. For example, D. W. Winnicott addresses the importance of holding, John Bowlby has much to say about attachment, and Jean Baker Miller describes mutuality.

What has been missing from these approaches is an understanding of the complex skein that constitutes the relatedness of normal adult individuals to one another, more or less as equals. Without a

differentiated understanding of relatedness, we are less able to grasp exactly what people are seeking or having difficulty with in their lives. A more finely tuned comprehension of what people are yearning for is a first step toward helping them attain or develop it. It also helps us to create environments that provide for different needs.

In *The Space Between Us: Exploring the Dimensions of Human Relationships,* psychologist Ruthellen Josselson uses a refreshing approach to illuminate the complex relatedness of normal adult individuals engaged in lifetimes of relationship. The purpose of this article is to present her multifaceted model and to discuss some of its implications for those engaged in ministry.

EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF RELATEDNESS

Josselson suggests that there are eight ways we attempt to overcome "the space between us" and enter into relationship. Not all of them are utilized in every relationship, and any particular relationship may involve more than one of them. Individuals tend to develop along certain "relational pathways" that emphasize one or two dimensions more than others. Josselson's eight dimensions of relatedness are:

- holding
- attachment
- passionate experience
- eye-to-eye validation
- idealization and identification
- mutuality and resonance
- embeddedness
- tending (care)

These dimensions are relatively universal and found across cultures. Although the ways in which they are manifested vary from culture to culture, the dimensions are present in some form in most cultures. A closer look at these dimensions of relatedness suggests many implications for spiritual direction, pastoral counseling, religious life, and ministry.

HOLDING

Holding is a primary and foundational dimension of relatedness. It is the feeling of "arms around us" that keep us safe and prevent us, in a basic way, from falling. To know that certain significant people are there for us—whether they are near or far, called upon or not—provides the primary sense of being held in adult life. Those people create a kind of "holding environment" in which we can safely exist. Nothing is more painful or more frightening than the sense that nobody is there for us.

We see Jesus seek a "holding environment" as he approaches his passion and death. Telling his friends that his soul is sorrowful, he asks them to stay awake and watch while he goes aside to pray (Mark 14:34–35, 37). He asks them to be there for him. We see his need and his disappointment when they cannot honor his request for one hour.

Sometimes a particular person—a spouse or partner, for example—embodies meaning for us. Our relationship to them structures our life and gives it meaning. If we lose that person, the loss of the holding qualities of that meaning is devastating.

Meaning systems often become the holding environments of adult life. We can be held by religious beliefs or beliefs in particular institutions. Our need for meaning is a need for the primary experience of being grounded so that we will not fall. When our beliefs are challenged, we react strongly, usually with resistance. When our relationships to institutions change, we are thrown into crises of meaning.

Issues concerning the holding dimension of relatedness emerge in many ways in ministry. Mixed expectations about being there are often a source of struggle in Christian communities. For example, is it the purpose of a parish to be there for its members? Perhaps a parish is not a holding environment, and members are not expected to be there for one another. But if being a holding environment is the purpose of the parish, how is that role implemented? The same questions are important for religious communities. Great pain can arise when people seek to be held and are not. Consciousness and intentionality about this dimension of relatedness may make Christian communities more effective.

Because embracing religion is one of the chief ways in which we make meaning, all catechetical and theological education efforts, which seek to change individuals' or groups' views and values, must take into account people's need to be held during that process. This is true whenever we ask people to do things differently—and thus to let go of something that, for them, has holding qualities. Much resistance to change has the fear of loss at its roots.

Holding, in the psychological sense described, is usually an aspect of pastoral counseling and spiritual direction relationships. The pastoral professional is always there for the other person. An excellent ethical barometer for these relationships is whether or not the client is asked to be there for the counselor or director. Also, pastoral counselors and spiritual directors need to be discerning about the extent to which they are there for their clients. They must strive to strengthen a holding environment in the person's life, apart from the professional relationship. These are but a few of the ways that psycho-

logical holding is part of the pastoral counseling and spiritual direction relationship.

ATTACHMENT

Attachment is closely related to holding, but it is not the same. When we attach, we "hold on" in an effort to feel less alone. In the absence of attachment, we feel alone; in the absence of holding, we feel ourselves fall. While holding and attachment usually coincide in early childhood, as adults we can be attached to someone who does not hold us, and we can be held by someone to whom we are not attached.

Attachment has to do with a sense of proximity— a sense that the space between us can and will be closed when we need it to be. Attachment grows with repeated experiences of being able to count on someone to respond to us. If a person does not respond to us, we may be related to him or her in other ways, but we will not be very attached. Unlike holding, which is a passive experience, attachment involves actively clinging to someone, literally or figuratively.

Scripture provides numerous examples of people actively seeking attachment to Jesus, counting on him to fulfill their needs. "'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.' And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean'" (Matt. 8:1–3). The people asked, and Jesus responded. Much of Jesus' ministry—healing the sick, feeding the hungry, teaching the curious—developed bonds of attachment, because Jesus responded to what was asked of him.

While we may be held by many people, we are much more discriminating about our attachment figures and accept no substitutes. This leads, of course, to the possibility of loss and abandonment, should an attachment figure go away. Knowing this, we have various strategies for protecting ourselves from potential pain, ranging from developing extreme self-reliance to carefully regulating our demands on attachment figures. Much of the complexity of our lives pertains to managing and maintaining attachments.

An important function of attachment is to provide a sense of emotional belonging. To belong to someone, to be claimed by someone as "my wife," "my sister," "my friend"—is tremendously important to many people. Jesus constantly used the language of belonging, speaking of "my sheep," "my people," and "my father." Some people, however, feel constrained by such claims and fear the demands that attachment may make on them. Spiritual direction may often be about contemporary versions of leaving everything "to follow me." Discipleship, which is an active attachment to Jesus, has a cost.

A moment's reflection will bring to mind ways in which attachment questions are played out in religious communities. The idea of belonging to and with everyone, rather than to anyone in particular, makes demands on individuals that they may or may not be able to meet. Some may see community as a refuge from the challenges and potential disappointments of attachment. Others may be unable to feel sufficiently attached without the degree of responsiveness found in an intimate pairing such as marriage. Good formational work will aid discernment around attachment needs.

Attachment, like holding, has to do with people being there. The quality of thereness is different, in that attachment has only to involve continuity of responsiveness. The response may not even be particularly helpful. What seems to count is that we matter to someone and are not alone. Knowing about this need to matter can help in identifying what may be at stake for a particularly contentious member of a community or pastoral team who creates conflict in order to get a response. Instead of conflict, perhaps other forms of responsiveness may be found that meet the attachment needs of the individual in a more productive way.

PASSIONATE EXPERIENCE

Passionate experience is the dimension of relatedness that has to do with desire, pleasure-seeking, and union with the other. Touch and physical contact are part of passionate experience, because when we are aroused by and desire someone or something, we want to touch and embrace the object of our attraction. The Song of Solomon is a classic expression of

passionate experience: "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! . . . O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me" (1:2; 2:6).

We yearn to incorporate and to become one with the person or thing we desire. This wish for union is the essence of sexual experience—and when sexual desire is linked with tenderness, mutuality, and attachment, it becomes a form of relatedness. Simple gratification of sexual drive with another person, however, is not necessarily relational.

While sexuality is a primary vehicle for the experience of union, people have many ways of seeking intense connection. Particularly if sexual activity is eschewed for one reason or another, individuals find passion in other forms. They may, for example, identify with themes of desire and union in the arts. Intense, nonsexual friendships may be containers for passionate connection. Negative forms of interpersonal relatedness, such as high conflict and frequent fighting, may also be expressions of the desire for intense union.

The regulation of passionate experience has been one of the chief undertakings of traditional Catholic sexual ethics. The church is still struggling with its understanding of sexuality and passionate experience. Much developmental ministry needs to be oriented toward rehabilitating toxic notions of sexuality, which have promoted guilt and depersonalization and contributed to the objectification and denigration of women. A sensitive hearing of this dimension of relatedness, in all its myriad manifestations, is essential to good ministry.

EYE-TO-EYE VALIDATION

A critical aspect of relatedness, which tells us about our emotional meaning to others, is eye-to-eye validation. In eye-to-eye relating, we discover that what we do has an effect on others. Our actions may produce responses that are pleasurable to us or reactions that we do not enjoy. We begin this connection by eliciting smiles or frowns from our mothers, and we continue the process in increasingly complex ways throughout our lives. Most important, we need to matter to someone. To bring light to someone's eyes, a smile to their lips, a warmth to their voices, tells us that we are valued, welcome, and wanted. Not to be wanted or needed by anyone is one of the cruelest sufferings we may endure.

This dimension of relatedness is essential to our sense of who we are. We see ourselves mirrored in the eyes of those who love us. In eye-to-eye validation, the trajectories of separateness and connec-

tion come together, as we be and become in and through the response of the other to us. To be seen and prized for who we are is a key dimension of our relatedness.

We encounter this dimension of being seen and prized for who we are in examining Jesus' relationship to Peter. In spite of Peter's brave words of fidelity, Jesus looked him in the eye and said, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times" (Mark 14:30). He saw Peter for who and what he was, and he loved him still. Perhaps this eye-to-eye validation was what allowed Peter to forgive himself for betraying Jesus; Judas, on the other hand, took his own life in guilt and despair.

The "mattering" in eye-to-eye validation raises questions of justice. Who matters? Men or women? Younger or older people? Able-bodied or disabled people? People of color or white people? Richer or poorer people? Christian communities are challenged to live a commitment to the idea that everyone matters—that everyone deserves to feel valued, welcome, and wanted. Attention to this dimension of relatedness supports this commitment.

We also need to provide genuine opportunities for people to matter, especially by taking their contributions seriously. A great source of pain in the institutional church, and in various Christian communities, is "consulting" people for their input and then ignoring it. The church's internal struggle with democracy may reflect its difficulty with truly letting everyone matter. The church must look everyone equally in the eye and see them for who and what they are.

IDEALIZATION AND IDENTIFICATION

Idealization and identification have to do with being drawn to others because we want to possess attributes that we find in them but not in ourselves. We do not so much want these people as we want their characteristics. At various times in our lives, we need people who embody our ideals. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, recognized the need for models: "Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us" (3:17).

The essence of idealization is a kind of calling forth into new realms that the self perceives dimly as good but has not yet realized. Persons we idealize help us to expand who we are; they move us and shape us. Paradoxically, as we identify with and internalize the admired attributes, the actual interpersonal connection may diminish.

Counteridentification is another aspect of this dimension of relatedness. All of us have people in our lives who embody qualities we do not want for our-

selves. We counteridentify with those people in what can be an intense form of relatedness.

The church, with its long tradition of discipleship, encourages its members, and especially its ministers, to offer themselves as sources of identification. For complex psychological and political reasons, certain members of the Christian community—namely, priests and religious—are often idealized. Idealization and identification contribute to an imbalance of power in a relationship, leaving open the possibility for abuse of that power. Thus, while idealization and identification may be positive aspects of relationship at different moments in a life, they require special attention to boundaries, which protect vulnerable persons. Perhaps the greatest value of this form of relatedness is that when reality sets in and the power attributed to the venerated other is taken back, the person is empowered to act on his or her own behalf.

MUTUALITY AND RESONANCE

Mutuality refers to the process of persons being with one another. When we join with another person, we experience resonance. Mutuality is the creation of a "we" or an "us," which human beings find enriching and rewarding. There is a sense that together we create a new thing that is more than either of us alone. Resonance is the feeling state surrounding this cocreation.

Because mutuality occurs "in between" selves, it is difficult to describe—and always seems to lead to hyphenation: Martin Buber referred to the "I-Thou," Jean Baker Miller speaks of the "self-in-relation," and Daniel Stern suggests a state of "being-with."

Mutuality has as its goal the pleasure of being with someone. While doing things together may be a vehicle for being-with, the desire in this dimension of relatedness is to share experience. People seem to have a profoundly social nature and tend to find pleasure in simply dwelling together in moments and experiences. Doing something with someone is profoundly different from doing it alone—and we seek and enjoy the resonance we experience in communion with another person.

Interestingly, the sacrament of Holy Communion has been founded on the phrases "This is my body" and "This is my blood" (Mark 14:22, 24), leading to a tradition of sharing bread and wine together. An alternative communion is suggested in the statement "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). Jesus seems to indicate the power of persons to bring something more into being by their presence together.

> Our yearning to belong and our wanting to be with others "like us" have complicated implications for those seeking to live relationships based on Christian values

Whereas empathy is usually something offered by one person to another, mutuality is a shared experience. I feel not that you understand my happiness or pain, as in empathy, but that we had a good time together or agonized together. Resonance is also different from eye-to-eye validation in that an affirmation of some aspect of myself is not what I seek. Rather, I seek to be me, being with you being you, and creating an "us" that I enjoy very much.

Mutuality is the glue that binds us together as human beings. While mutuality is probably the most common experience of relatedness, it remains difficult to characterize. It occurs in complex ways; it may be present in a ten-minute conversation with a stranger on a train or in a two-hour silence with a longtime friend. It is not easy to describe experiences of mutuality and resonance logically; we tend to know them intuitively or affectively.

EMBEDDEDNESS

When we feel part of something greater than ourselves, we feel embedded. Embeddedness has to do with our social existence: because we are part of a social context, we are. Like holding and attachment, embeddedness is a silent, passive process rather than an active and clamorous one. Embeddedness defines the context of our relatedness by giving meaning and limits to all our relationships. Vital and serious contracts spring from our embeddedness. As Josselson points out, the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet is meaningful because being a Montague or a Capulet is of consequence to the people involved.

Erik Erikson described this dimension of relatedness when he talked about the struggle to make the

> **Christian tradition, especially religious life, has had a tendency to encourage a self-sacrificing, even martyred form of care that has been a great disservice to many people**

self a part of the world and the world a part of the self. By being part of the worlds we inhabit, and through their being part of us, we organize our identity and our relationships to others. Our embeddedness is a ground from which we operate relationally.

In order to be embedded, we must be socialized sufficiently to be like the members of the world in which we are embedded. Only then can we belong to the group. The alternative is social isolation. All of us need a place to belong, to be like others, and we will go to great lengths to fit in.

Because it has to do with enculturation and socialization, our embeddedness has considerable impact on the other dimensions of relatedness. For example, we learn through our socialization how and with whom and when it is acceptable to express our sexuality. Our enculturation tells us how we are to view relationships with persons outside the family or community. Various cultures are more or less constraining in the dictates for belonging or embeddedness.

Christian communities are very much cultures of embeddedness, raising questions of what people have to do to belong. Jesus addresses the issue of belonging, suggesting that in his father's house there are many rooms, making it possible for all kinds of people to belong. Parishes, however, have many unwritten rules for membership. Formational practices of religious communities enculturate new members, sometimes at a high cost to their individuality, so that they may belong. Dioceses have their "in" and "out" groups. In Rwanda, one might ask how to be a member of the Hutu or Tutsi tribe and also be a Christian. We could also ask how one can be "one of the guys" and also be allowed to shed a tear; how one can be a "real woman" and also have drive and ambition. Our yearning to belong and our wanting to be with others "like us" have complicated implications for those seeking to live relationships based on Christian values.

TENDING

The need to care for others is a part of our relatedness. It reflects our need to feel needed by others. Importantly, care contains both ethical and affective dimensions. Psychologists Nell Noddings and Carol Gilligan both place care and connection at the heart of an ethical system. Jesus, reproaching those who thought the woman anointing his head with expensive ointment was wasting money, said her act of tending and care would always be remembered (Mark 14:3–8).

Why do we care? Perhaps because we have been tended to and cared for. Perhaps because caring is an outgrowth of who we are. Perhaps because it is a way to connection, and we enjoy being connected.

We have many ideals about care, especially selfless love and total altruism. We are also adept at critiquing the ways in which we have failed to care as well as we should have. But we are rather unsure about what "good enough" tending and care look like.

Tending reflects an attitude and conveys a feeling. The attention and tenderness it involves usually move into acts that take care. But actions alone do not express tending and care—as the child of any busy parent who sends a check instead of bringing a gift will tell you. People have very different capacities to care, and the ability to tend and care does not come automatically. The capacity to care involves balancing the need of the self and the other and requires reflection and strategy. It is more complex to care for others as they need to be cared for than simply to hold or feed them.

Christian tradition, especially religious life, has had a tendency to encourage a self-sacrificing, even martyred form of care that has been a great disservice to many people. In the name of care, lives have been lived in needless humiliation and suffering. The martyrdom of self-sacrifice is not only self-destructive; it also destroys relatedness. We have come recently to a more balanced approach to care. We recognize that an ethic of care requires self-care as its foundation, because we love others only as we love ourselves. A balance is required between our own needs and the needs of others. Tending to others, and putting their needs on an equal footing with our own, creates connections between us and others. Sharing others' lives in this way, we enlarge our own selfhood.

FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

This multidimensional approach to relatedness heightens our awareness of the complexity of human yearning for connection. For pastoral counselors, it offers a means of comprehensive and differential assessment of clients' strengths and weaknesses in the important domain of relatedness. It helps people differentiate their needs—not simply "I need more relationship," but "I need these kinds of people, doing these kinds of things, to meet these kinds of needs."

For spiritual directors, the model suggests many avenues for exploring individuals' relationships with God. To what extent do they feel held by God? How do they strive to actively attach to God? Is there any intensity or passion to their experience of God? How do they feel validated by God? Is God a healthy source of identification and idealization, or is God all good while they are all bad? Is there a genuine feeling of another presence in the relationship with God and the pleasure of sharing and cocreating life? Does the person belong with God? Are efforts made to tend the relationship?

Pastoral ministers may wish to consider how they incorporate the various dimensions of relatedness in their work. Do parishes provide opportunities to belong? Do homilies speak of the importance of all the dimensions in relationships to others and God? Is there any passionate experience in the liturgy? Are people sufficiently held by the community and its leadership in times of change and high risk?

All ministers can benefit by an alertness to these dimensions of relatedness in their own lives. Knowing which dimensions are salient or problematic for themselves at particular times helps them distinguish their needs or biases from those of their clients or parishioners.

Gender differences are an important consideration in understanding the multiple aspects of relatedness. Studies show that women and men manifest the various dimensions differently. A moment's reflection will remind us of "he said, she said" conversations:

"Can't you see I'm upset and need to be comforted?" she says. "Why do you think I washed the car?" he replies. Sensitivity to these differences is critical to those who would contribute to building up human relationships.

Understanding cultural differences in the way the dimensions of relationship are manifested is also critical for effective ministry. One culture's way of tending and care may mean quite the opposite to another. The demands for belonging vary with every culture of embeddedness. For people to experience relatedness across cultures requires an understanding of the meaning of different ways of relating.

To talk of human beings' yearning for one another is, of course, to talk of love. A ministry based on "Love one another" needs to pay a great deal of attention to relationship—to how we need and want to love one another.

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Leadership in Men's Congregations

Domingo Rodriguez, S.T., and Loughlan Sofield, S.T.

In an article entitled "Managing the Dream: Leadership in the 21st Century," recently published in the journal *Training*, Warren Bennis makes some distinctions between managers and leaders:

- The manager administers; the leader innovates.
- The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective.
- The manager asks *how* and *when*; the leaders asks *what* and *why*.
- The manager has his eye on the bottom line; the leader has his eye on the horizon.
- The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.

Some religious in leadership positions describe themselves as being in administration, and some describe themselves as being in leadership. We suggest that the difference is more than mere semantics. These two viewpoints reflect differences in the basic attitudes of these religious toward their role and may indicate how they invest most of their energy. How religious in leadership positions describe their role may also indicate whether they perceive that role as enriching or as burdensome. It is our belief that those who see leadership as their primary role and function, rather than administration or management, find that role more fulfilling and life-giving.

Individuals' perceptions of why they were elected or appointed also affect their attitudes toward leadership. Do they believe they were selected to lead or merely to administer, manage, and maintain? The answer to this basic question influences how they assume leadership in the congregation. Even if they believe they were elected to provide leadership, it is probably safe to assume that those who appointed them were ambivalent about wanting them to lead.

Most organisms, including religious congregations and their individual members, spend a great deal of energy protecting themselves against change, both personal and corporate. Though the members of a congregation may indicate that they desire the council to assume a leadership role rather than an administrative one, the leaders can expect to encounter resistance and criticism as they call and challenge members to conversion.

This article presents our beliefs about leadership in men's congregations. We have developed these beliefs through reflection on our own successes and failures in leadership. In no way do we imply that we see ourselves as exceptional leaders, as described in *The Future of Religious Orders in the United States: Transformation and Commitment* by David Nygren and Miriam Ukeritis. Nor do we claim to have developed a formula or model for effective leadership. Rather, we are responding to the invitation of the editors of Human Development for readers to share their experiences as a catalyst for further discussion.

The Nygren-Ukeritis study differentiates between outstanding female and male leaders. We have chosen to direct our comments toward men, although women leaders may find information that is relevant to them. Our goal is to share insights gleaned from our experience as leaders in an apostolic clerical con-

gregation with one hundred thirty finally professed members and an additional seventy men at various levels of initial formation. This article outlines some general principles that guide our leadership style. We do not claim that the general membership of the congregation shares our perceptions. Finally, we must give credit to those who preceded us in leadership. Their decisions, style, and initiatives influenced our present approaches.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP

Our successes and failures have led us to develop three principles that guide our leadership:

1. Christian leadership is effective to the degree that it is grounded in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and incorporates behaviors reflecting that belief and relationship.
2. Outstanding leaders animate the goodness and positive qualities of their membership in order to achieve a vision that is mission-oriented.
3. Effective leadership is best achieved when the general or provincial and his council work together collaboratively, as brothers.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

It seems a truism that effective leadership of any Christian organization must be grounded in a personal relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. However, experience has shown that it is easy to give lip service to this principle while acting as if success depends on one's own wisdom and skills.

Nygren and Ukeritis have discovered that "outstanding leaders, much more than the typical leaders of religious orders, are rooted in faith and grounded in their awareness of the presence of God." They have found that the difference between typical and outstanding leaders is that the actions of outstanding leaders are based on "their awareness of the presence of God and how that awareness inform[s] their actions."

In addition to attending to our individual prayer lives and praying together as a council, we have discovered two additional ways in which dependence on God has directly influenced and informed our actions. First, when we encounter an issue that is extremely important or complex, we delay further discussion until we have an opportunity to spend adequate time engaged in prayerful discernment. One member of the council, skilled in methods of discernment, leads us through this process. This helps us more intentionally seek the will of God and place our decision in the context of our relationship with God.

The second way we intentionally call ourselves to a more explicit awareness of the presence and activity of God in our proceedings is by participating in a process of corporate reflection. Occasionally, an issue emerges that requires discussion of a depth greater than permitted by the time constraints of our regular meetings. When such an issue is identified, a member of the leadership team is delegated to prepare an evening of corporate reflection. The purpose of the reflection meeting is to prayerfully sensitize ourselves to the issue, not to reach an immediate decision. Usually, we read and prayerfully reflect on some prepared material in advance.

Corporate reflection bears much fruit. First, it allows us to hear the will of God as revealed through the discussion. Second, it helps us understand and listen to each other in ways that we often do not when faced with the time constraints of completing an agenda. Third, it provides new insights that help us develop more creative responses in the future. Ultimately, the success of any church leadership group depends on the degree to which each member has a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and relies upon that relationship as the basis for all decision making.

TOWARD A COMMON VISION

We applied our three general principles of leadership to a specific issue: the development of a mission statement for our congregation. We found that animating the membership toward a common mission involved the identification of a life-giving vision, the willingness of leadership to take aggressive action to pursue that vision, and the commitment of the membership to fulfill that vision.

The Old Testament warns that when there is no vision, the people perish. One of our first actions was to reflect on what had transpired at our congregation's chapter of the whole. Our aim was to engage in a corporate reflection process in order to articulate the vision that emanated from the chapter experience. Through reflection, we determined that the vision that would guide us during our term should have a number of specific characteristics representative of the times in which we live:
- *a sense of hope* at a time when many, losing faith in society and its institutions, are beset by a sense of helplessness and hopelessness;
- *an energizing component* to rekindle the zeal and enthusiasm of confreres afflicted with ennui, who describe themselves as tired and burned out; and
- *a willingness to expand and risk* at a time when our congregation has an increasingly aging and declining membership in the United States.

ASSERTIVE LEADERSHIP

A vision, by itself, has never accomplished anything. Most religious groups seem to spend an inordinate amount of time perfecting vision and mission statements, yet they invest only minimal energy in implementing them. Assertive leadership is vital to the latter process.

Nygren and Ukeritis have identified major traits that differentiate outstanding male leaders from outstanding female leaders and from typical male leaders. One of the characteristics of outstanding male leaders is their willingness to begin new projects and to support them with assertive actions. We decided that to carry out our vision, we would attempt to move the congregation into new ventures, which often provide a sense of hope and excitement and result in a greater commitment to accomplishing a stated vision.

This decision involved leaving apostolates that had been our domain for decades and venturing into new, unknown areas. It also involved organizing continuing-education and congregational meetings in order to prepare the confreres for these changes. These actions met with both success and failure. From the very beginning of our term, however, we communicated to the confreres that in trying new things, we would surely make mistakes. We invited the congregation to challenge us directly whenever we erred.

In moving into new apostolates, we were confronted with one of the major problems faced by leaders in religious congregations today. Some of the members engaged in our current apostolates resented the expansion at a time when they were feeling stretched to their personal limits. They would have preferred to see us reinforce existing apostolates. As a result, we became the recipients of their anger.

One of the great tensions of leadership is to remain faithful to the congregational vision without becoming unduly affected by the anger that some decisions generate. We are convinced that we will be life-giving to the degree that we continually discern the unmet needs in the church and in the world and utilize our available resources to respond to those needs, regardless of the reaction of the confreres.

COMMITTED MEMBERS

By themselves, elaborate vision statements and assertive leadership are ineffectual. The confreres must be committed to achieving the apostolic goals of the congregation. A primary responsibility of leaders is to develop a working alliance with the entire congregation, through which the confreres can be motivated to work together to reach those goals. Toward this end, we determined that we should develop an alliance, not an adversarial role, with the confreres; see presence as a prerequisite for establishing that alliance; and communicate to the confreres our conviction and our esteem for them.

Too often, confreres are viewed through a historical lens that precludes a contemporary perception of them. In conducting personnel interviews, we were overwhelmed and edified by our priests and brothers. They are exceptional men, committed to serving God and God's people. We have all the problems inherent in any group, but the goodness is also evident. As a leadership team, we discovered that we had to accentuate the goodness and giftedness of each individual, rather than nurture memories that could negatively color our perceptions. We chose to focus, as much as possible, on the strengths of members rather than on their weaknesses. When leaders feel threatened or anxious, they are much more likely to scapegoat confreres who have been identified as problem individuals. We had to challenge ourselves whenever any form of scapegoating arose. By changing our own perceptions, we were in a better position to establish an alliance with each confrere.

What clearly emerged from the chapter of the whole was a desire by the confreres for the general and council to be more present to them. The challenge is to be present without being smothering, infantilizing, or patronizing. We made it a priority to try to have at least one of us present at every congregational gathering. This proved effective. We discovered that our presence provided an opportunity to quash rumors—which, left unchallenged, have an insidious way of gaining credence. When present, we communicated that the members had a right to know any information with which the council was dealing, except for personal information about any of the members. Not only did our presence and dialogue clear up misconceptions; it helped to extend ownership of decisions to everyone.

Both personnel and pastoral visits uncovered valuable information. We found, for example, that there are identifiable groups in the congregation who are experiencing hurt and alienation. It became a priority to convene those groups to engage in dialogue about necessary changes.

Ultimately, what coalesces a group toward a common vision is a sense of being valued, respected, and esteemed. We attempted to communicate our appreciation to the confreres in a number of ways. The most common was making personal contact in the form of notes and phone calls from the general and other members of the council. There were additional ways, such as practicing directness in dealing with each confrere. We believe that if we are in receipt of

information about an individual, we have an obligation to share that information with him. Unless this is done, decisions are based on assumptions, and the person is denied an opportunity to challenge or correct perceptions. It is anxiety-producing to confront individuals with information that may be difficult for them to hear. In most cases, however, confreres expressed gratitude for the directness and honesty with which we proceeded. Of course, this was not always the case, but we still believe that directness on the part of leadership is appropriate.

COUNCIL AS COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

Wisely, religious congregations do not expect a single individual to be the receptacle of all the gifts needed for effective leadership. The election or appointment of a leadership group (i.e., a major leader with a council) is the norm. The more a leadership team is able to function collaboratively, the more effective it is.

One problem is that the term *collaborative leadership* is currently used in such a variety of ways that its meaning has become unclear. We propose that collaborative leadership has certain definable attributes: it is primarily based on the concept of gift; the greater the level of self-esteem of each member of the group, the more likely the members are to minister collaboratively; collaboration is not an end in itself, but a way of ministering together for the sake of accomplishing a mission.

For us, the basis for collaboration is gift. We have utilized both formal and informal ways of helping to identify the gifts of each member of the council. Based on this discernment of gift, we attempt to delegate tasks to the persons most qualified to undertake them. This facilitates the tasks and responsibilities that we must assume, while also affirming the unique gifts of each individual.

Closely related to the issue of giftedness is the issue of self-esteem. People who effectively use their gifts in service and ministry usually esteem and value themselves. When these same gifts are affirmed by others, self-esteem is reinforced. Conversely, when gifts are not affirmed, self-esteem can plummet. The leadership team may then be characterized by hostility and by competition, the antithesis of collaboration.

The most effective collaborative leadership has the quality of a positive relationship. Ideally, there is a clarity of role and functions, but it goes far beyond that: people have a sense of respect for each other.

Finally, in attempting to function collaboratively, we have made certain practical observations that have contributed to our success. First, because the goal of collaboration is mission, any meeting at which we took no creative action for the future was considered a failure. If we attended only to the usual agenda items that focused on issues of maintenance, we were not being faithful to our vision, goals, and responsibilities as leaders.

Second, time had to be allocated to evaluate ourselves in terms of our internal workings and relationships as well as our approaches to dealing with the work of the congregation. The basic question was, "Is there a better way of doing this?" The primary characteristics of effective leadership include the ability to be self-critical and the willingness to change. However, while self-evaluation is essential, it should not become an obsession.

Third, we managed to avoid spending valuable time at meetings dealing with issues that one person or a small group could handle effectively. This communicated our trust in one another. Collaboration does not mean everyone doing everything together, nor does it mean that there is no one designated leader with the authority to make unilateral decisions. Some groups have vitiated their leadership potential because they have confused the end with the means. The end is always the mission. Collaboration is merely a way of accomplishing that mission and can take many different approaches.

Fourth, we recognized that collaboration doesn't mean insipid homogeneity or a lack of differentiation. Maintaining healthy, positive relationships within the council is important, but it is equally important for each member of the council to discuss issues with people who are not part of the council—especially issues that might be causing inner turmoil.

We invite both women and men leaders to add their voices to this discussion of leadership by sharing their experiences and insights in future issues of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

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Self-Managed Teams in Parishes

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I work as a consultant to parishes that want to do better at what they are doing. I am usually asked to advise parishes that are very busy with programs and concerned about developing ministries among the laity. Staffs in such parishes are concerned about the empowerment of laity and tend to be ready to think in new ways.

On the back cover of a recent issue of the *Journal of the American Society for Training Development,* an advertisement from Zenger Miller (a personnel development company) contained the table reproduced on this page. I recognized it immediately as a description of what I think is needed to understand how parishes should move to be effective today.

Column 1 of the table can easily be seen as the pre-Vatican paradigm for local church leadership. Column 2 looks very like the church that Vatican II promoted in its documents. Column 3 definitely seems to me to be the kind of church we need to build at the local level today. It is time now to move beyond involving people in ministries to building parish ministries into self-managed teams or communities. The key concept in such a shift is to believe that we can find people mature enough to plan, manage, and evaluate their performance without outside supervision by pastor or staff. Don't get nervous yet— this process will actively involve pastor and staff in

LEADERSHIP		
Activities Found in a Traditional Workplace	**Skills Required in a More Participative Workplace**	**Additional Skills Required in a Team Environment**
Direct people	Involve people	Inspire teamwork
Explain decisions	Get input for decisions	Facilitate and support decisions
Train individuals	Develop individual performance	Expand team capabilities
Contain conflict	Resolve conflict	Leverage team differences
React to change	Initiate change	Champion innovation
Manage one to one	Coordinate the group	Create team identity and responsibility

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selection and training during the early stages. The vision I offer is one in which the right people are in the right ministries; they are formed to do those ministries well, and they are trusted to perform well.

NEW ROLES NECESSARY

My first experience of the self-managed team was in a parish in Oklahoma, where I saw a group of eighty young married couples who met monthly. The group was entirely in charge of its own meetings and program. Staff members were welcome at meetings but not responsible for the program. Patrick Brennan describes this kind of situation when he says, "I will not begin a ministry without developing lay leaders and a ministering team that will own the ministry."

With self-managed teams, pastor and staff serve as educators and resource people, not as coordinators and supervisors. All over the developed world today, this formula is being tested. For the first time in American history, reorganization has come to mean letting go of middle managers, creating teams, building competency and trust, and lowering supervision. In the book *Leading Teams,* John Zenger describes the condition that creates malaise in organizations: "Stuck organizations are management-centered . . . [managers] see themselves as the central players in the organization and assume they need to control everything." Peter Block is right when he says in *Stewardship* that clarity of requirements, not control, is what is important in today's environment.

It is interesting to observe that for some years now, both bereavement groups and groups of divorced and separated Catholics have been largely self-managed. In most parishes these groups ask for a meeting room and then take care of their own program. Usually, a diocesan office of family life arranges for group leader training. The enthusiasm is there, and adequate training is provided. There is no apparent need for parish staff management.

The Saint Vincent de Paul Society and the Legion of Mary have always been most cooperative with pastors and staffs but have always been largely independent of local staff supervision. Much of this may be due to a strong diocesan, national, or international structure. The people at the local level have known how to take guidelines and do ministry for themselves. The point is that parishes already have self-managed ministries in a number of places. We now need to extend the practice in systematic ways to all parish ministry groups.

RETHINKING MANAGEMENT

For five major reasons, now is the time to get serious about rethinking our way of managing parish ministry.

The first reason is that God is doing something in the world. God wants empowered people to use their gifts for the community. People coming to spiritual maturity in the parish have management gifts in ministry. The less they are blocked from using those gifts, the more those gifts can develop.

Second, many of our parishioners have been involved in group work and skill training in their workplaces. Their familiarity with team training, skill development, and systematic planning is abundantly evident when they participate in my workshops on collaborative skills.

Third, the concept of "gifts," which we have used since Vatican II, has caught up with us. Many of our core parishioners believe it, and they want to be more responsible now. As Max De Pree says of American workers in his book *Leadership Jazz,* "The great majority are well-prepared and thoroughly motivated. They need participatory structures." De Pree feels so strongly about using the gifts of people that he calls thwarting human potential a betrayal. The major sin of those in authority is preventing the use of gifts by people.

Fourth, we will never accomplish all the things we need to do in parishes if we don't find new ways of working. I like to ask parish staffs to make lists of all the things they would like to do if they had the time. I have never gotten a list of fewer than twenty items. We may never get to full-scale evangelization if all we do is maintain what we are doing and do that with shrinking resources.

Fifth, there is the distinction made by Peter Block about the need to move American institutions toward stewardship. He sees so many American institutions struggling with patriarchy and its cousin, parenting. The call to stewardship is a call to partnership. Dependency is characteristic of both patriarchal and parental approaches to organizing. If I am to "own" my local church, I need to become a partner in it today. Patriarchy and parenting may have been necessary for sociological reasons at other times, but they won't work in present-day America. Block leaves us with what he calls the two most useful questions he knows for organizations today: (1) How would partners handle this? (2) What policy or structure would we create if this were a partnership?

In the 1990s some new archetypes of leaders and managers have been emerging. The leader is not just the visionary, charismatic, creative, prophetic one. The manager is not just the persevering, systematic, rational, pragmatic one. The first time I noticed an indication of a change in those ideas was about eight years ago, when the American Management Association offered a five-day workshop entitled "Coaching and Counseling Skills for Managers." Today's leaders and managers are being asked to work more collaboratively, with a team orientation. The commitment is

clear in secular America. I always think back to the first chapter of Acts and note that the church invented this gift-based community experience. It is time to reclaim our birthright. The new archetypes for pastors and staffs have much more to do with educating and mentoring than with control and supervision.

DEVELOPING SELF-MANAGED TEAMS

In an article in *Church* magazine, Matthias Neumann, writing about collaborative ministry, observed that "we need to commit to ongoing education. . . . It ought to be taken for granted that team ministry will challenge us to learn and interiorize new social skills." Stephen Covey, in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, tells us that collaborative ministry will require "openness, a spirit of adventure, a high tolerance of ambiguity, low structure certainty and [lack of] predictability." I believe that attaining these qualities is within the range of average people, especially once they know they are expected to do so.

Having digested much of what has been written about self-managed teams, and having been a practitioner in a number of good parishes, I have come to the conclusion that there are five characteristics of good team development within staffs or ministerial groups.

Group vision is crucial and must be arrived at by the exploration of individual members' visions and priorities. The group must discuss such questions as, Why are you here? What do you hope for? What keeps you going and gives you life? What do you think is most important for us to accomplish? In doing so, the members must share at a deep level that will bind them together. Common elements in individuals' responses should then be summarized in an expression of the group's vision. No more than simple facilitator training is necessary to guide this process. Peter Senge's book *The Fifth Discipline* has an excellent chapter on shared vision.

Mutual accountability assumes that everything that is going on belongs to everyone. In terms of parish staff responsibility, this means that although someone may be the "primary responsible" person, everyone in the group is responsible for success. As John Zenger says, "stuck organizations . . . see themselves primarily as . . . collection[s] of separate departments . . . as silos of vertical power." The sense that everyone is responsible for thinking about everything can foster tremendous energy in a group. Of course, sensitivity regarding ministerial turf must be tempered if others are also responsible in an area for which one is the primary responsible member.

Synergy is the effect of a process that engages people who accept mutual accountability. Stephen Covey makes the case for exciting organizations. As he notes, everything in the natural world is synergistic. All one's bodily organs are interrelated; all one's brain parts are made to work together; all plant life needs the rest of nature—earth, air, water, and fire (plants even commingle roots, and increased richness results). Married people are highly synergistic with their spouses; families can't escape synergy. For Covey, the world of human relationships is the most catalytic, unifying, and exciting of all the synergies: "The more genuine the involvement, the more sincere and sustained the participation in analyzing and solving problems, the greater the release of everyone's creativity and of the commitment to what they create. This, I'm convinced, is the essence of power in the Japanese approach to business, which has changed the world marketplace." Perhaps you have attended some good meetings and noticed that all sorts of new alternatives begin to open up through personal interaction. Some companies today have departments of innovation, whose major task is not to come up with new ideas but to create new ways of thinking that can help other departments become creative with their own members. Groups usually need help in learning to structure synergy.

Group decision making comes naturally to a mutually accountable group operating in a synergistic way. The right people are assembled, and they are responsible and creative as a group. They can be trusted. The role of the pastor in such a meeting is to support and facilitate decisions. Why wouldn't he? This is a highly functioning group, and an idea will get a wealth of testing. If this seems unrealistic to you, remember that I am describing the work of a team after much development has taken place. That development can be structured, as I will discuss later.

Support is a natural outcome of the preceding processes. People become more interdependent by working in an environment of common vision, mutual accountability, synergy, and group decision making. It is important to recognize what Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas Smith observe in *The Wisdom of Teams:* "The emphasis is on the challenge of the task, not team-promoting enterprises. . . . Teams founder without a performance challenge." Members' support for one another will be a by-product of their working together well.

Writers about the team approach tell us that excellent teams are rare. When I visit a parish that wants to develop self-managed teams, I ask the staff to assess existing ministries and put them into one of

the following categories: Presently self-managed / Close to self-management / Could be ready within two years / Could be ready with new leadership / Far from ready / Will never be ready. It is not hard for a staff to do this kind of categorizing.

Next comes the planning of a strategy for moving ministry teams to assume more responsibility for themselves. The key to developing and moving groups is found in the "situational leadership" model, made popular by Ken Blanchard, who recently wrote a book entitled *The One-Minute Manager Builds High-Performing Teams*. In Blanchard's model, four leader behaviors may be called for, depending on the maturity level of the individual or group: directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating. As in all situational leadership theories, the leader has to assess the group's degree of maturity and use those behaviors in trying to move the group toward full maturity. The first stage, directing, includes setting forth visions and goals, providing training in skills, and clarifying roles. In the first stage, it is the leader who is primarily responsible for setting direction. In stage two, coaching, the group needs help with its situation, and the leader needs to be sensitive to how the group is getting stuck and what resources might be helpful. In stage three, supporting, the group has moved toward more maturity and knowledge and can do most things for itself. The members have become partners. They may still need to discuss some things with leaders, but now do so as equals. The need for additional skills may emerge in team members' self-evaluations. Leaders may serve as resources or provide referrals at this stage.

In the fourth stage, delegating, groups can operate independently and can be trusted to do their tasks well. They have arrived at a healthy independence and can meet their own needs, including the need for recognition of a ministry well performed. They have become responsible for their own direction and support. If they haven't managed the task

of interdependence with other ministries, it is the creative task of the leader to provoke the group's attention to that issue.

As I conclude this overview of self-managed team ministry, I am reminded of Stephen Covey's remark on why people don't change their way of working when they know that things are not quite right: (1) they are not hurting enough; and (2) they don't want to change their lifestyle. That gives us cause to pause and reflect.

The journey is exciting. The pastors and staffs that have embarked on it are the most energized people I know. It took God six days to create. It may be just day one or two for us, but the early days of creation are very important.

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Religious Chapters with Organic Governance

Catherine M. Harmer, M.M.S., Ph.D.

Chapters have a long history in religious congregations. The original chapters were monastic—a calling together of all the professed members of the monastery to discuss and decide, with the abbess or abbot, major matters concerning the monastery, such as the admission of a member to lifetime vows. The mendicants of the thirteenth century introduced an adapted model of chapters, based on the spread of their members throughout many countries. Later, with the emergence of the apostolic communities, representative chapters—initially, meetings of the local or regional superiors with the general leadership—became the norm.

Historically, the purpose of chapters has been to discuss major matters concerning the good of the whole, including constitutional changes, major directions in mission and ministry, and the election of general leaders. After the codification of canon law, many constitutions became excerpts from the code, with a few specifics for each congregation written in. For all practical purposes, most constitutions were indistinguishable from one another, and changes were relatively rare.

Eventually, chapters began dealing with less than major matters, moving into the policy and procedural aspects of congregational life and often into the nitty-gritty of daily living. During the mid-twentieth century, prior to the renewal chapters, the major questions for many congregations were about wearing wristwatches, driving cars, and the minutiae of common living.

Since the time of the mendicants, an understanding has emerged, both canonically and within congregations, that one of the major purposes of the chapter is to give the membership an opportunity to have a say in what is happening and what will happen in the congregation. This was especially important when the familial organization of the monastic model was replaced by a hierarchical model with centralized authority as a result of the geographical spread of congregations' members into many countries. In the hierarchical model, decisions were made by the central leadership with little or no involvement of the members, except at the time of the chapters.

Since the renewal chapters of the late sixties, many women's congregations have moved into participative forms of governance—some into fully developed organic models, others into adapted hierarchical models based on participative principles. In these congregations, starting at the local level and involving various other levels as appropriate, there are ways for members to make decisions or have input into the decisions. Often this is done through representative chapters at the regional, provincial, and general levels.

As a congregation moves into a more fully organic model of governance, fewer matters need the special attention of a chapter. In some cases, this has meant the introduction of very short chapters. More often, the chapters have begun to serve functions other than governance. Thus, in relatively localized (e.g., national) groups, chapters become meetings of the whole, building congregational spirit and serving as unifiers. Often, such a meeting is called an assembly rather than a chapter. Conversely, in some congregations, chapters are moving back to deciding many things that are more appropriately decided by other governance bodies.

In national groups, over the past decade or more, there has been an increasing call for all-member chapters. In such chapters there are no elected delegates; anyone who wishes to attend and will commit to the required time and work becomes a full participant in the chapter. Although there are some canonical questions about this form of chapter, many groups who wish to have them have found ways to do so.

In international congregations, the need to hold an election is often the primary purpose of a chapter, combined with the need to maintain unity among members in diverse countries and cultures. The success of the second purpose is mixed in reality. For many, chapters become highly politicized meetings colored by varied degrees of antipathy among participants under pressure to further their own national or cultural agendas. Recently, someone from an international group, speaking of her congregation's next chapter, remarked that it would begin with a session in which a member representing each culture would speak of the strengths and the weaknesses of that culture. Her relief at this was based on her sense that it was time to stop focusing only on the wonderful things about cultures outside of the United States and concentrating only on all that is negative in American culture.

In this century, another element has affected chapters: the mystique of being elected a chapter delegate. In some congregations it was once understood, if not actually laid down in law, that only local superiors could be elected to a chapter. As congregations opened the possibility that nonsuperiors could be elected, a belief took root that if someone is not elected to be a chapter delegate, a lack of trust or confidence in that person is implied. Consequently, some groups still using delegate bodies have developed elaborate methods of election to ensure representation of age groups, ministries, and even cultural groups within the whole.

DEFINING CONSENSUS IS KEY

Once congregations move either partially or totally outside of the hierarchical model in their own governance, the chapter becomes in some sense an anachronism. It is not needed as a way of giving the membership a voice in what is important for the congregation; that is safeguarded through the structures and procedures of an organic model. Except for small, relatively local congregations, however, the election of leadership is still something requiring chapters.

For a truly organic form of governance, what should eventually develop is an understanding of consensus and a constant willingness to build it. The word *consensus* is often misunderstood to mean unanimity and is sometimes limited exclusively to discussions of decision making. From the Latin *consentire*, meaning "to feel together," *consensus* refers to harmony, solidarity in belief and sentiment, and consenting together. The simplest form of this occurs in the local group—which, through living, talking, and praying, comes to consensual attitudes about many things.

In the organic model, consensus implies that governance of the whole is based on methods that emerge from a system of listening, talking, understanding, and balancing to achieve a feeling of togetherness and solidarity. Obviously, this is a demanding modality, used regarding important matters; the same degree of effort is not invested in, say, reaching a consensus on the color of the new drapes for the living room. In organic models in large or widely dispersed religious congregations, consensus is developed through a mix of group meetings and gatherings of representative bodies that have studied the emerging consensus. On truly significant matters—major directions of mission and ministry, charism and identity, choice of leadership—it is important for the consensus to be honored, regardless of where or how certain decisions are made.

It is also important to separate out the less critical matters of administration and management, which are delegated by the whole to certain leaders who have been called forth to that service. Unfortunately, we human beings are often more concerned about details of the food service and who cuts the grass than about how our decisions move the mission forward. We have a sense that we know about, and therefore can make decisions on, the less weighty matters.

Whereas leader groups have both leadership and management functions, chapters, at their best moments, concentrate on leadership functions. They are not management groups, and cannot be, because they exist for only a short time every so many years. When chapters move into management issues, they often preempt and hamper the normal governance of individuals elected to leadership roles. Leadership, by its nature, means a focus on the vision, on the major purpose (i.e., mission), and on the challenging of the members

to carry out that purpose. Its principal function is to keep everything focused on achievement of the mission—the main reason for the congregation's existence.

For national congregations, assemblies of all the members are gradually replacing chapters, even if the latter term is still used. For international congregations, some things still require the attention of a chapter, whatever it may be called. These are constitutional changes, major directions in mission for the next years, and the election of all or part of the general leadership. Election is the element that has experienced the least creative development since the movement toward organic models began. All-member elections do not seem feasible, given that individual members' knowledge of other members is often limited to those in their own country.

At present, even in organically functioning congregations, chapters are not integrated into normal governance. They remain something different and special, and are often very time-consuming and costly. They need to be integrated into normal governance and its consensual processes. The following reflections on accomplishing this are based on larger congregations with regions and provinces, but they are adaptable to smaller, more geographically contiguous groups as well. The larger model is discussed here to illustrate that consensual chapters are possible in large congregations, even international ones. Clearly, they can also be achieved, with a fair degree of ease, in smaller or national groups.

TOWARD CONSENSUAL CHAPTERS

For a chapter to be consensual, it must do more than follow a particular decision-making procedure. That is a final step and makes sense only if earlier steps have led to the chapter recognizing and affirming the consensus, or working toward a consensus when it has not been achieved. Just as various leadership groups, such as councils, function best when their decisions come out of the members' consensus, so too do chapters function best, in the sense of dealing with very significant matters, by making decisions on the basis of the members' consensus.

A group whose members are divided, politicized, or alienated cannot reach consensus, no matter how hard the group works, and regardless of whether or not it reaches unanimity in a decision. In international groups that are still engaged in battles of the past along national, cultural, or ministerial lines (e.g., congregations in which educators and health care workers have been in competition), what appears to be a consensus may only be a negotiated settlement. Even worse, delegates may trade votes in a quid pro quo, as in the political realm. Conversely, for a

congregation that is basically unified, the chapter, like other forms of governance, can be consensual.

The three basic elements described below are present in any chapter, but they do not fit well with a consensual form of governance:

Preparation for the chapter. While it has become acceptable to set a theme or purpose for a chapter and to have some oversight of the processes, the actual preparation for the chapter has taken place among the members, often within provinces or regions, with an emphasis on the presentation of the reality of each part of the congregation and its concerns. The chapter can extrapolate from this what is best for the whole, but doing that is a jump, because different—and sometimes quite separate and contradictory—agendas can emerge.

Delegates to the chapter. The delegates are elected by the members either at large or within provinces and regions. Because of the mode of preparation, however, the delegates too often arrive at the chapter as a group, with a province or region agenda. If this problem is compounded by a history of difficult relationships within and among the parts of the congregation, an adversarial stance is a danger, even if cloaked.

An additional problem is the number of delegates, which is often based on the total number of members in each province or region. This makes good sense in a hierarchical model, because you want to have the necessary votes to assure passage of your agenda. It makes much less sense, however, when you are trying to work toward a true consensus of the whole about the whole. Also, it has led to quite large chapters, but not always to a good representation of the diversity, for example, of the varied ministries.

Agenda of the chapter. The agenda is shaped by two realities: the theme or stated purpose of the chapter and the recommendations of the various parts of the congregation. In some groups, the delegates from different provinces or regions have attempted to share their recommendations with each other, but what has not occurred to any great extent is a sharing across the membership. Thus, on any given topic, a chapter may potentially deal with as many agendas as there are provinces or regions, rather than one agenda based on an emerging or already achieved consensus of the members.

CHAPTERS WITHIN ORGANIC MODEL

In my opinion, the most important thing we could do for chapters would be to integrate them into the

consensual mode that is the norm for the organic governance model. In the organic model, the elected leadership makes a considerable effort to facilitate meetings of the members in local, area, and regional groups for the purpose of addressing major matters of mission and direction. From these members' meetings it is possible to identify issues on which there is a clear consensus, or perhaps the beginning of a consensus that needs more development. In listening, talking, and reworking, the leaders can speak to and affirm the consensus or call for further thinking and discussion. Often, this requires more than one cycling back to the membership. Organic models do take more time and effort, but that is important when dealing with major matters.

In carrying out its strictly management roles, the council does not need a consensus of the members. When there is a consensus on the major directions and decisive matters, the how-to of implementation is normally left to the elected bodies.

For the general leadership, the main work is to identify the growing consensus, across the whole congregation, about those aspects affecting the whole. Reports on the management elements and some discussions of overall policy and procedure may be necessary. However, the true work of the general leadership is to help keep the congregation unified and to see either to the implementation of a consensus already achieved or to the furtherance of efforts to reach one.

When an organic model is working well in a congregation, the members are involved in the central questions that face the whole group—questions of ongoing identity, mission, and future direction. Within their own provinces or regions, they are also involved, in appropriate ways, in dialogue with the leaders of those parts of the congregation. The organic, participative modality for the chapter needs to be of the same nature as that for the ordinary functioning of the congregation. As long as a group continues to have chapters, it is important that each be an integrated part of congregational life rather than a separate, potentially disruptive reality that occurs every so many years.

PROCESS FOR CONSENSUAL CHAPTERS

Building consensus. The general council may set the theme or purpose of the chapter, based on input from both leaders and members in the provinces and regions. A key theme at this time could be major directions for moving into the twenty-first century. The theme or purpose has to do with the whole congregation.

Once the theme or purpose is established, conversations can begin within all the parts of the congregation. The process is initiated in the local groups, however they are organized. It is important that the focus of each group's conversation be on the whole, not on that group only. What each part sees as important for the whole can lead to broad directions for the whole congregation. After the directions for the whole have been set by the chapter, the provinces and regions can explore how best to contribute to those directions locally.

At some point, especially in large or geographically dispersed congregations, either all-province or all-region meetings could be held. The consensus then would move from the local group to the region and then to the province. If meetings of the full membership of regions or provinces are not possible because of distance or cost, the results of each local consensus could be shared in written or videotaped form with all the other groups. It is essential that a communication system be part of the plan, so that members living in different areas know what is developing in other parts of the congregation. It is also possible to choose representatives to meet as a consensual body to identify a consensus that is developing or has been reached.

The whole consensus-building period is actually part of the chapter, in the sense that all members are speaking to important concerns about the future. At various points, the general council informs everyone of areas in which a clear consensus has been reached across the congregation, as well as areas in which it has not yet been reached.

Final consensual group. A final consensual group would include the general leadership plus additional members from the distinct parts of the congregation. The group's task would be twofold. First, it would confirm the consensus that has already been achieved across the whole, even if in different wording. Second, in those areas where a general consensus has not yet been reached, the final consensual group would look for a basis for consensus and build on it. If consensus is not possible, then the issue(s) in question would revert to the local, regional, provincial, and general groups for governance—or possibly be resubmitted for consensus at a later chapter. Some ideas take longer than others to come to fruition.

Members of the consensual group would be chosen for their demonstrated ability to work for consensus of the whole congregation. In other words, they would be people willing to listen, to build, to identify an emerging consensus, and to forward it.

Elections. A final consensual group would also be integral to a chapter of election. Using the same

consensual approach already described, each part of the congregation would recommend candidates for positions of general leadership. These would not be individual nominations; they would be group nominations based on consensually directed discussions. The focus would be twofold: the emerging consensus in terms of future direction, and the roles of the elected leaders as part of the organic model of governance.

Those nominated and willing to serve would be invited to be part of the final consensual group. This would give them the opportunity to be involved in achieving the final consensus and help them to be realistic about their ability to work for the implementation of the decisions made.

A discernment retreat for the nominees, held before the final gathering, could help them reflect on their call to leadership, their own abilities, and those of others among the nominees. This retreat would combine prayer, reflection, and sharing to help the nominees come to an informed decision concerning their response to the call.

The final consensual group also would approach the election in a mode of discernment and consensus, being open to the Spirit, to input from the members, and to the sharings of the nominees in terms of their own discernment. The election, to be truly discerning, would include prayer; personal reflection; serious and respectful discussions, both among the nominees and between the nominees and other congregation members; and, finally, the election process itself.

Documents. For any chapter in which changes to the constitution and secondary documents are foreseen, the matter for the changes would go through the same consensual process, from local level to region to province to final consensual group. Where there is congregational consensus, the final group would simply affirm it; where there is no consensus, movement toward consensus would be part of their work.

ADVANTAGES OF CONSENSUAL CHAPTERS

There are several advantages to moving to truly consensual chapters that are integrated into the full organic model of governance. The major advantage is continuity of the whole. Chapters have the potential to become disruptive elements in the life of a congregation. They take place after one to two years

of preparation, and one or two years before the next chapter, they "take over" the normal functioning and flow of congregational life. If chapters are simply part of the whole, they will lose this disruptive though special nature.

Second, as an integrated element in the full consensual approach, a consensual chapter will highlight the importance of members being truly involved in the most important matters confronting the whole congregation.

Third, moving to consensual chapters might lead to shorter chapters, with fewer people needed to serve in final consensual groups because all members will have already had the opportunity to be seriously involved. Fourth, an integrated chapter will lead to greater ownership by all members of decisions based on member-involved consensus.

A TECHNOLOGICAL POSSIBILITY

Given the rapid technological developments in virtual reality, interactive television, and online computer networking, it is not far-fetched to think that in the near future we will be able to carry on some of our meetings—local, regional, provincial—from our living rooms and offices, without the hassle and cost of air travel and special accommodations. With computers and modems, congregations could hold consensual chapters without any members of the final consensual group having to leave their homes.

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The Comforts
of
Type B Christianity

Warren Johnson

If people are familiar with Type A behavior, it is often only because they have heard that it is exhibited by many of the high achievers of our society, or that Type A behavior is associated with vulnerability to heart attack. Little is known beyond that, even among counselors—especially that its distinguishing characteristics are not high motivation and achievement but something far less flattering: status insecurity and hostility. This may be why psychologists are leery of the notion of the Type A individual. Some, however, seem to discount the concept because it was pioneered by a cardiologist; others I have spoken with see it as just another pop psychology concept based on an unrealistic either/or categorization. Personally, I suspect that Type A research is downplayed because it is so damning of values and aspirations in which our society takes intense pride.

The theory of Type A behavior is based on sound research. When it was established that the Type A pattern was an important cause of heart disease, large amounts of medical research funds were put into studies conducted by psychologists and psychiatrists. The results have not been without controversy, but that is true with all theories.

For me, the findings of Type A research simply rang true. My own Type A qualities have been the source of the greatest pain in my life, whereas the Type B qualities with which I am blessed have been the source of my greatest joys. I was fascinated with the insights the research provided on the disturbing changes in our society. But what really seized my attention was the realization that Christianity is Type B through and through; that insight was an important factor in my own conversion. I see the research as providing a solid scientific basis for Christianity—something I didn't think possible. Let me try to explain.

UNCERTAINTY AND PAIN

The origin of Type A behavior turned out to be a lack of unconditional parental love as a child. This was not surprising; the essential role of love was clear from other research. But with several studies in which thousands of subjects were followed over long periods of time, the Type A research was large in scale, and it tied together a number of other research threads. It is summarized in *Treating Type A Behavior and Your Heart* by Meyer Friedman and Diane Ulmer.

Why is parental love so important? Without it, children seem not to gain the security that full human development requires. It leaves them feeling defective in some way, undeserving of their parents' love. They do not gain the sense of comfort, well-being, and self-acceptance that allows them to venture out into the world in an untroubled way as they grow up. Instead, they strive anxiously for their parents' love, even by misbehaving if necessary; then, as they grow older, they turn to society as a whole to gain the acceptance they did not get from their parents. With little sense of who they actually are, they strive to succeed in ways society honors, usually by seeking wealth and influence. This accounts for their competitiveness, and the intensity of that drive is what produces the impatience so characteristic of Type A people—the "hurry sickness," to use Friedman's apt phrase.

Where does the hostility come from? Status insecurity and low self-esteem are painful conditions for people to live with, and they generate anger and resentment toward the persons and institutions perceived to be the causes of those conditions. Because the sources of their pain are vague and ill-defined, Type A individuals express hostility, mainly toward people in general, with whom they are competing

for status and respect. They also vent their hostility toward those with whom they are closest—spouses, children, parents, coworkers, neighbors—because those people are such convenient outlets for it. The hostility expresses itself in a number of ways. Some of the most common are an easily aroused anger, even over trivial things; a quickness to take offense; an urge to control others; a tendency to see faults in others and to envy their success; and the frequent use of obscenities.

Contrary to the popular impression, many (if not most) Type A individuals are not successful, and their hostility often takes the form of a smoldering resentment toward the society that makes their own failure so obvious—and so painful. This has led some researchers to see cynicism as the distinguishing characteristic of Type A behavior, because to see society as corrupt is a way of explaining one's own lack of success in it.

INABILITY TO LOVE

The worst affliction of Type A individuals is their inability to love. Love was not something they had much experience with when growing up, so they have little feeling for it or its supreme role in human relationships. Type A people often express skepticism about love in other people, suspecting it of being fraudulent or manipulative, which of course it can be. One result is that their marriages are usually unsatisfactory—and, saddest of all, they pass their affliction on to their children. As parents, Type A individuals are drawn into a way of life that is ever more competitive and status-conscious, and their children are inevitably left with less of their parents' time and emotional energy. At the same time, the youngsters face their own increasingly competitive world of fashions, friends, and fitting in.

Virtually all of us have Type A characteristics to varying degrees; it is hard not to in this society, where winning is everything. (When was the last time you heard someone say, "It's not winning that's important, but how you play the game?") But Type A behavior must be seen as an affliction—one that takes away from the pleasures of life and makes it difficult to relax and to enjoy things as they are. Not only do the impatience, hostility, and insecurity eat into us; they cause pain to others too, and make the world seem hostile, or at least something to be overcome rather than savored. Because Type A behavior makes close human relationships difficult, the Type A person finds it easier to go it alone, to put energy only into his or her own achievements. But the senseless, ungovernable drive to succeed leads nowhere, for it is insatiable. Even supposedly successful people frequently

demonstrate how painful their Type A ways are when they commit suicide. Friedman reports that many executives, after suffering heart attacks, confess that they were thankful for them—that it was a relief to be forced to stop working, to lie in a hospital bed and be taken care of by nurses, to have doctors make all the decisions. The heart attack finally forced them off the treadmill of Type A life.

All of this makes one wonder just who should be envied in our society. Perhaps superachievers should be pitied for the pain that drives them so insistently and denies them the greatest of joys—that of loving others. Perhaps the mother content with taking care of those she loves is the one to be envied. This is certainly the message of the Sermon on the Mount: blessed are the poor in spirit, the merciful, and the pure in heart; it is in giving that we receive.

TYPE B COMFORTS AND CHRISTIANITY

Type B behavior is just the opposite of Type A—cooperative, flexible, and forgiving. Being comfortable with themselves, Type B individuals are slow to take offense and feel no need to control others or to tear them down in order to build themselves up. Because they are not trying to impress others, they sometimes seem bland compared with Type A people, who put on sparkling performances—but Type B people enjoy other people and are easy to be with. Most important, they are able to love their spouses and their children, to accept them as they are, and to forgive their failings and misdeeds.

Christian ethics encourage Type B behavior. They counsel generosity rather than competitiveness; they ask that we do unto others as we would have others do unto us. They instruct us that rather than strike back in anger, we should turn the other cheek and forgive those who trespass against us. Only a person without sin is free to cast the first stone against a sinner, and pride is the first of the Seven Deadly Sins. Wealth is to be used for the benefit of all, and charity is a pervasive obligation. Even if we could love our children—the easiest people to love—in the way the Bible asks, the future would be far brighter than it is.

The transcendental beliefs of Christianity are also Type B. A loving God is always there to sustain us, even if our worldly parents fail us. God acts as an earthly father is admonished to act: loving his children but directing them in the right path, hating sin but forgiving it out of his love for us. In other words, God provides the unconditional love that Type A research says is essential if a child is to grow up with a feeling of security and self-acceptance. The Catholic church cherishes the figure of Mary, the ideal of

motherhood: always loving and always forgiving, the finest expression of the feminine. Growing up sustained by faith in such love, people will have the confidence to be themselves and to do what is right, regardless of what society tells them.

SELFLESSNESS IS CENTRAL

Selflessness is the only element common to all the world's great faiths. All see liberation, enlightenment, and salvation as coming from selflessness in one form or another. If Christianity has any merit compared with the older and in some ways more sophisticated Eastern faiths, it is in the form of selflessness asked for: love, with its synergism that blesses both those who give it and those who receive it. We are commanded first to love God and then to love others as ourselves. In the words of Christ, "There is no commandment greater than these."

This is not to disparage the forms of selflessness asked for by other religions—the cessation of desire in Buddhism and Hinduism, the surrender to the will of Allah in Islam, and the bringing of honor on one's family and society in Confucianism. All lead to societies very different from ours, which is moving in just the opposite direction, toward ever greater self-centeredness. There is a certain logic in thinking of ourselves first—thinking that if something is good for us, we should go for it. But it makes sense only from the position of the individual; what feels good to us may feel decidedly different to others. This has led to the fear of being taken advantage of, of being used for someone else's purposes, that is so pervasive in this society; it is the source of "the long loneliness" by which Dorothy Day characterized the modern era (and for which she named her autobiography). The same dynamic has contributed to the decline of the community, and it is now eating into marriage and the family as well.

COOPERATION IN COMMUNITY

The genius of all the great religious systems is that they have served to mold conflicting individuals into a cooperative group, a community that would make brothers and sisters of all people. All religions have had to get down to the nitty-gritty of the everyday problems of people living and working together. To press for selfless behavior, leaving people to cope with the conflict between duty and desire, has never been easy, but good things have come out of it—including Type B comforts and security. Its satisfactions have caused people to hold to their religiously defined worlds determinedly, and to see them as their greatest gift.

It is in this ordering of everyday life that our society has failed so badly. Most worrisome of all, there may already be a self-sustaining process at work that is creating Type A behavior; it is being encouraged in both our weakening families and our increasingly competitive economy. This trend shows every sign of continuing, even though it leaves people fearful about where it is taking us. And even though it is deeply at odds with what Christ asks of us, the churches rarely speak out against it. Do they fear that to do so would threaten the frail psychic constitutions of their members?

Yet as the momentum of the economy falters, so will faith in it. Its unsavory ways have long been justified by the greater freedom and abundance they offer, but now these qualities are growing overripe and leading to a selfish, spoiled society that enriches few and injures many. If it does not decay for this reason alone, it will be pulled down by resource depletion and environmental breakdown. As these outcomes become clearer, and as the pain associated with them becomes more intense, the true basis of our faith will become apparent. It will then truly become a saving grace.

What can we do today? Many things, of course, but one is all-important: we must love our children. We must love them with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength. Only in this way will there be those who are strong enough to act as the saving remnant, to show by their words and their deeds the truth of what Christ has said to us.

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The Lost Art

James Torrens, S.J.

When you lug in the laundry basket
of your daily mail and go fish
through catalogs and appeal letters,
rolling your eyes up in supplication,
or your face goes down into it
rummaging, what I wish for you
is the swimsuit of script that barely
a postage stamp will cover
 or the skimpiest upper on which
are written personal and engaging
words, such as hello, help,
sorry, thank God, you O.K.?

I remember now, without my scorn of old, the woozy message of Dean Martin as he closed his television program: "Keep those cards and letters coming." Fact is, they do not keep coming. Letter writing is no longer the enterprise it once was. At Creighton University these days, an English professor is coediting the complete letters of Henry James, by the thousands. In England the widow of T. S. Eliot is undertaking to publish her husband's letters. The first thick volume gets him to age 24; she has forty-three more years still to cover. James and Eliot, of course,

were writers, but they had friends and acquaintances who wrote first or wrote back.

These days there are whole countries from which letters are hardly to be expected. In my own experience, Nicaragua is one such. For no reason I have been able to fathom, return mail does not come from my friends there. My true concern, however, is much closer to home.

For the record, I do not lack for personal correspondence; I probably could not handle much more than I get. But one thing does puzzle me. I am in the seventeenth year of writing for HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. How often do I hear by mail from readers? About once every three years. I used to wonder whether my efforts were merely falling into a soundless well. Not controversial enough? Not challenging enough? In recent years, through opportunities to travel around the United States, I have met readers aplenty of this magazine, and they have thanked me for writing. My unspoken reaction: "Ah, so you're out there."

My point, I suppose, is that people have gotten so used to contact by way of conversation, and find themselves so busy, that they get out of the habit of dropping notes—whether of commendation or of disagreement, whether to friends or (even more unlikely) to strangers. Don't wait until they die, folks!

Another experience: I once was appointed religious superior of a large community that had begun planning a renovation of their chapel. They had called in the redoubtable Robert Rambusch as liturgical

architect, and the plan he had presented was predictably daring. After Rambusch had spoken to the community, my predecessor had invited written reactions. Soon after, I inherited the letters he had received—all unfavorable. What I then did was send a written plea for the plan, by parts, to everyone in the house, asking them to return it to me with their judgment and comments. To my amazement, the responses—about equal in number to my stack of negative letters—simply said, "Sure, sounds great, go right ahead." (This allowed us to proceed, though with modifications on hotly disputed details.) Where, I have asked myself, were all those enthusiasts in the first round?

My conclusion is that we write when we are upset. We write under a head of steam. Saint Ignatius (like Solomon, much is attributed to him) is supposed to have said, "Never send off an angry letter right away. Let it cool overnight." I don't think I ever neglected that advice without regretting it.

I find also that we often write when we do not find ourselves quite able to say something directly—to lodge a protest, to deliver an unfavorable estimate, to fire a person—in a word, to confront. It is less painful to do this by paper and not be around to see or hear the reaction. But a letter should not be an act of cowardice.

Those who are civic-minded and conscientious often take part in letter-writing campaigns. Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Chiapas, Mexico, when asked about one active sympathizer in the United States, said with a sort of wonder, "Not too long ago I sent out a call to her for some international support, and the next day sixty letters arrived." These are sixty letter writers, God bless them. But to do a good letter, and to not merely repeat someone else's formula, takes time and effort. One cannot fulfill all the calls—at least I can't.

Now, as an editor of a weekly Catholic magazine, I get to read our letters to the editor. This is a genre that readers enjoy; letters add real spice, and often the drama of controversy, to a periodical. The most effective, to my mind, are the letters that do not go on and on but are short and sweet, succinct. I remember the old advice about writing to *Time*: The editors will cut any fat, so be careful with every sentence. Be sure that whatever is quoted can stand alone and not betray you.

For business letters of any stripe, I recommend the advice I once heard from a president of the Bank of America: Let it not exceed one page. Try to express on one page the essentials of your urgent proposal, your self-recommendation, whatever.

Letter writing is an art, accessible to practice. Let this field not be left to fanatics, from whom epistles will always keep flowing. Epistles are often not requisite. Quicker notes will do—postcards, for instance. A well-chosen and well-phrased postcard has qualities unattainable in e-mail. Let not the sellers of postcards or notecards or letter paper languish for lack of buyers.
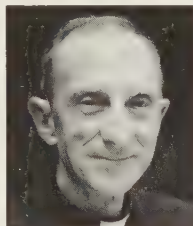
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Saint Clare of Assisi Teaches About Formation

Marie Beha, O.S.C., Ph.D.

Have you ever seriously considered founding a new religious order or congregation? Most of us could probably give an immediate response—in the negative. It is an idea we have never seriously considered: "That is not my call," we might say with relief. Nor, in all probability, have most of us thought much about being part of a founding group. At our most adventuresome, some of us have opened a new house, made a foundation, started a mission. That was quite enough.

Yet there is a sense in which every religious is called to be a founder or foundress. Whenever a group of persons, committed to communal life, comes together for the first time, they are founding a new community. Whenever someone enters an established group, the result is a new set of interpersonal relationships and thus a new community.

This process of founding, of forming community, is always going on. It is a daily dynamic, so ordinary that we don't give it much thought—unless we experience difficulties. Then we may call on the "experts" for a workshop, a new book, the latest cassette, hoping to find a magic "how to."

In my experience, theory rarely matches either our expectations or our needs. The hard work of forming community remains. That was the challenge of all those who started our orders and congregations. To a much lesser degree, it is the challenge of each of us as we begin again today to be formed in forming community. It is also a truth of each of our lives: we develop as individuals when we come together to form community, and the community we form becomes formative of us. The process is a continuous, spiraling cycle of development that is both personal and social; we grow together, or we do not grow at all.

Each of us desires such formation in community—a longing articulated in the human hope of growing in wholeness, integration, and union. But the process is costly, its price apparent in all the forces for isolation and withdrawal that threaten personal and communal disintegration. Each individual suffers from internal divisions: flesh lusts against spirit, and spirit rebels against daily embodiment. Communities are torn apart by conflicts as emotions take their toll on truth, as conflicting opinions harden into defensiveness. Choices are made, and separation follows. Nuclear families split; neighborhoods disintegrate; races destroy each other; nations war. We know the whole litany of misery and grow afraid. Will we ever find our way home?

Our heart answers: Only if we come together, allowing the counterthrust toward unity and unification to push or pull us into the reality of formative

community. This response raises two fundamental questions: How are individuals formed in a developing community? How is community formed as individuals come together in all their glorious diversity?

I would like to indicate some of the ways in which community formation happens, using principles and illustrations from the story of Clare of Assisi and the contemplative community she founded. I choose this exemplification out of the conviction that contemplative community serves the broader church by offering an intense microcosm of the "what" and "how" of persons coming together in formative community. I also hope to underline the importance of community in Clare's charism, where it stands alongside her better-known devotion to Lady Poverty and her love-filled practice of contemplative prayer.

INITIAL FORMATION

The first formation for community occurs in the nuclear family, in which parents and siblings grow as individuals, coming together in a reciprocal process that spirals toward ever greater integration. When any family member grows, all progress; when a family becomes more united, each member is enriched. That is the multiplication effected by unification in community. It is paralleled by the divisive power of a group in which the members do not come together; in such a group, everyone suffers loss.

There is no escape from this first law of community formation: We grow together; we disintegrate together. We experience this in the tragic breakdown of families, which leaves members exposed and often defeated. But we also celebrate it whenever a family expands because a member has reached out to serve a greater need.

Clare of Assisi illustrated some of these dynamics. In her family, she learned basic behavior patterns considered acceptable by the standards of her time. Within this context, she began to relate to others and to the wider world around her. Such basic socialization is one of the expected functions of early family formation.

Clare's family was of the nobility; she learned early on what that meant and how to incorporate the values of her class into her self-concept as well as her interpersonal relationships. No wonder Saint Francis called her "Lady Clare."

Within her extended family, Clare began to relate to many and diverse kinds of people. It was invaluable experience for someone who would be called to form community with a wide variety of persons attracted to Franciscan ideals.

Family also grounded Clare's first lessons in religious discipline, exemplifying values that she made her own. Clare's mother was especially devout, expressing her piety in the risky undertaking of long pilgrimages. No wonder that her oldest daughter could later embrace the risks of an unconventional form of religious life. Likewise, within family she learned a keen sense of loyalty to the church, which found expression in her obedience to the pope, even while she protested his decisions.

For Clare, family was also a source of countercultural formation, inculcating values contrary to those of thirteenth-century Assisi. Clare's mother permitted, and perhaps encouraged, her daughter to give to the poor, even allowing her to send choice parts of her own meals to those less fortunate. Such realistic option for the poor is never easy or popular.

Still more important, family provided the pattern for the most significant of Clare's future relationships: she learned the meaning of being a sister to others, a model she would use to describe and structure the relationships in the community she would found. It seems no accident that her blood sisters, Catherine and Beatrice, both joined her in forming the community of San Damiano, as did her mother and several members of her extended family.

It is the genius of both Clare and Francis that they took the simple everyday paradigm of sister/brother and made it the heart of their vision of religious community. Rather than continuing the prevailing hierarchical model of religious life, both founders called all—even those in leadership roles—to relate to one another as sisters and brothers.

What does it mean to be a sister or brother? First of all, it is the foundational experience of reciprocal relationship: If I am your sister, then you are mine. We experience the same way of being-for-the-other and so are equally related to each other. There is no escape from our mutual bondedness. This is not to say that our relationship is fixed in stable categories. On the contrary, sibling relationships are dynamic, ever new, and so must be renewed in all the changing circumstances of daily living.

Biological sisters share the same parents; they have something in common just by being born. Most probably, they experience the same standard and way of living; in other words, they have a common life together. At the same time, however, each sister is unique, and she learns something of her special giftedness just by observing how different she is from her siblings. Fortunate is the individual whose self-concept is formed by the appreciation of family community.

COMMUNITY AUTHORITY

Nuclear family also provides one's first experiences with authority—most immediately, that of parents.

Here the relationship is nonmutual: I do not relate to the person in authority in the same way that person relates to me. Clare's initial experience of this kind of relationship must have been very positive, as she was later able to assume the role of authority without becoming authoritarian. She would invite all her sisters to be coresponsible in community. In this, she quite likely modeled herself on her mother. Ortulana, as we have already seen, was a strong figure; she gathered around her a group of relatives and friends to encourage each other in prayer and good works. It was a kind of lay community that inspired Clare's pursuit of formation in religious community.

Clare's absent father, in contrast, provides no role model. Was he away at war, or had he already died? We do not know; we can only note his absence and speculate on what the lack of paternal influence meant for Clare, observing, for instance, that she most often referred to Francis as "Father Francis."

Clare's story demonstrates that an individual is formed for community by being formed in community. The process begins in our family of origin, and we are always working out of the family model—sometimes building on its foundations, at other times rejecting them. In any case, we return to this beginning, discovering over and over the "how" and "why" of our present experiences of formative community.

Recalling and retelling stories of early family memories is particularly revelatory. Some of our first formative experiences can be shared profitably in a community setting; one person's reminiscence may spark recall in others. Such sharing also serves to promote understanding within community. As we hear how others have been shaped by their past, we are better able to appreciate their present responses—and they ours!

Testimonials given at the process of Clare's canonization show that such remembering must have gone on in the community she founded at San Damiano. How else would the sisters have known about the prophecy made to Clare's mother before Clare was born? "Lady Clare told the sisters how her mother, when she was carrying her, went into the church. While standing before the cross and actually praying for God to help and protect her during the danger of childbirth, she heard a voice telling her: 'You will give birth to a light that will shine brilliantly in the world'" (*Process* 3:28). That story was undoubtedly told and retold for many years in order to be recalled today in its present form. Our memories likewise form (or deform) us. We choose to pass on the most significant of them as we tell our stories.

FORMATIVE CHOICES IN COMMUNITY

Earliest formation in family community goes so deep that much of it remains unconscious and almost unrecognized. We do not question its truth until contact with a wider world forces us to perceive other opinions, other options. Then we must choose. After a period of often uncomfortable questioning, we may reaffirm our family's stance—only now it is our own. Or we may repudiate family values, choosing another set for ourselves. Much of this sorting through of what we have first learned in the family is the work of adolescence—at whatever age that stage occurs.

We can observe the same process in Clare as she responded to her family's efforts to provide her with a suitable husband. The expectation of her relatives —and of the culture of the time—was that a beautiful young girl would do her part to augment the family fortunes by making an advantageous marriage. There was every hope that Clare would do just that, and no "reason" for her refusal. What was she waiting for? At 18, she had delayed too long already. Still, Clare resisted; something else was stirring in her heart.

Then Clare heard about Francis. Everyone in Assisi knew about his dramatic renunciation of his patrimony, his going to live as a poor man laboring to rebuild the ruined chapel of San Damiano. Clare sent him alms. That was the beginning of an exchange that would enrich both of them—and all of history.

Clare went to hear Francis preach, and Francis came to the Offreducio home to speak with Clare. What she heard was quite different from the prevailing views of the times: from Francis, Clare learned how wealth and position could be exchanged for simplicity and humility, how alms given to the poor could be transformed into a life commitment to Lady Poverty.

The choice was Clare's. And choose she did, strongly and with courage. Clare committed herself to God as the first Franciscan woman. All subsequent choices of her life were summed up in this one. We too may experience a relationship that forms us so deeply that we are never the same. Or the words and example of some strong mentoring figure may change the direction of our lives. We can never anticipate the community of communal formation; we can only respond to it with a receptive heart.

But Clare's decision to join the Franciscan community was only a beginning. Francis and his brothers welcomed Clare on Palm Sunday in 1212, gave her a simple habit, and then took her to a nearby Benedictine monastery for safety. Family opposition would test her choice but in the end would only

strengthen it. The process of leaving behind for the sake of beginning, of growing stronger in one's commitment despite opposition, is part of most vocation stories. It is the way we enter a new community and begin to experience its formative powers.

The community Clare had chosen was that of Francis and his first followers. The Benedictines with whom she began her religious life could not provide the formation she needed; she had to move on. Discovering that a particular group is or is not "right for me" is an important part of formation in community. The question, To what am I called? must be answered in the specifics of a particular community. In initial formation, the need is for free and open, mutual discernment on the part of both individual and community. Later on, the same question of suitable community must be raised, but it is no longer so open-ended; it must now be asked against the backdrop of whatever level of committed response one has already made. And that level should grow as choices are determined and their consequences lived through. A postulant of a few weeks, for example, usually has a very low level of commitment; more is required to begin the novitiate, and much more to make profession. We see this formative process in the growing clarity of Clare's life choices.

Even though she realized in the first weeks of her religious life that her call was not to the Benedictine community, Clare was formed to some extent by her brief stay there: she experienced the grace of monastic stability, the regular rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours, the steadying influence of simple work. But she also observed that accumulated wealth could stultify religious spirit and that authority in religious community could be more expressive of monarchical power than of gospel service.

SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY

She moved on. The next stage of Clare's formation found her in a different community—a small group of laywomen, probably Beguines, who lived together, working to support themselves, while serving the needs of the poor and sick. Much of Clare's experience in that community formed her life call. Working, as well as mendicancy, incarnated her desire to be poor as Jesus was poor. Close community was also integral to her vocation. But Clare's call was to religious life—specifically, to the charism of Francis. Once again, she and her first companions would move on.

Such searching out of vocation is an integral part of forming and being formed in and by community. Initially, this may involve changing the whole geography of community choice—a learning that includes moving on to a different place. But if community is

> **The process of being formed for community begins in our family of origin, and we are always working out of the family model— sometimes building on its foundations, at other times rejecting them**

ever to assume its full formative role, a permanent commitment must be made not only *in* community but also *to* community. As we are about to see, Clare was no footloose wanderer. She would spend the next forty years committed to her sisters at San Damiano.

As she noted in her *Testament*, "by the will of God and our most blessed father Francis" (30), Clare moved a third and final time. Accompanied by a few companions, she began the challenging task of founding a new religious community—thus initiating a process of daily new beginnings that continues to this day.

We don't know many details about the earliest days of the community, but those that are recorded give us insight into the dynamics involved. One thing is immediately clear: community formation was not easy then, just as it is challenging today. In her *Testament*, Clare speaks of "deprivation, poverty, hard work, trial" as well as the "shame or contempt of the world" (28). Beginning community is full of risks. It always involves the "deprivation" of accustomed ways, the "poverty" of having personal weaknesses exposed as members rub against one another, the "hard work" of forming new relationships. To these inherent difficulties, some may add misunderstanding of our motives; others clearly oppose our basic orientation. The realism of our desire for formation in community is tested. The issue is, How will we respond? Difficulties can defeat, but they can also

deepen commitment, testing its strength against the opposition.

Clare and her sisters stood strong together. When Francis saw their resolve, he gave them a simple "form of life" document to structure their experience. Unfortunately, we have only a fragment of this first document, describing how the sisters desired to live as "daughters and servants of the Most High King, the heavenly Father . . . espoused to the Holy Spirit." More specifically, they wished to live "according to the perfection of the holy gospel" (*Rule* 6:3,4). Such common motivation lies at the heart of communal formation. Community must articulate its ideals— sometimes in words but, most important, in life. Each sister must also internalize the community values, allowing her own life direction to be challenged, as well as supported and strengthened, by that of her sisters. All go forward together.

Who leads? In the beginning at San Damiano, everyone did, each in her own way; there was no official leader. For three years, the little group seems to have functioned in a totally collegial fashion. Clare probably wanted this form of government to continue. Perhaps she understood instinctively that it was the best community structure for developing the leadership potential of each member, as well as for expressing the truth that each person is responsible to and for the group.

Circumstances changed her plans. The Fourth Lateran Council—the Vatican II of that period—called for the renewal and adaptation of religious life. Only four religious rules were recognized; Clare and her sisters would have to adopt one of them and seek canonical approval. To do this, they needed an official leader, an abbess. Clare was the obvious choice, but she resisted, yielding only to Francis's insistence; the document says he "almost forced her" (*Process* 1:6).

She submitted, her own project giving way before obedience, emphasizing yet another aspect of community formation: even our most authentic desires will be purified by it, often in ways we do not expect. In this crucible of obedience we learn to accept, to submit, but without denying the truth we perceive. That is exactly what Clare did. She accepted the position of abbess but refined its meaning in the large letters of her own life. With all the power of her womanly intuition, she knew that the most formative influence on the nascent community would be the force of lived experience, not that of the title she bore.

ONGOING FORMATION IN COMMUNITY

Life together in community would continue to form Clare and her sisters in the long days, months, and years ahead at San Damiano. There was no established blueprint to spell out for those pioneers the details of feminine Franciscan living. They would have to work it out together, and in that very process they would be formed, both as individuals and as a community. It is the way we all must go—and grow.

Communal commitment was central to their life. The sisters committed themselves to forming community together. Though theirs was initially an individual response to God's call, it was also a response in and to community. Together they would say their "yes" to God. As each individual promised to be faithful to God's call, the community in its turn pledged to be there for the individual "all the days of her life." The vows were solemn promises of this mutual fidelity. What they pledged was participation in the process of ongoing formation in community.

Initial formation addressed this issue of commitment in community in terms of basic discernment. During the novitiate, candidates discovered whether the community provided a setting in which they could live out their call, while the community assessed the individual's capacity to participate in the group and be formed by it. When both discernments were positive, mutual commitment was professed.

Just as individuals differ, so do communities; no two are alike. Each has a particular gift to give, a specialized ministry in the service of the Kingdom. Attraction to this lived charism draws individuals together; it is the glue that cements communal bonds, despite the wide variety of individuals in community. The stronger this bond of common attraction, the richer the variety of persons who can be integrated into it. Clare's first formative community included relatives as well as strangers, peasants along with nobles. Together they came to form one body.

Clare described the heart of this formative process for the community members in the familiar terms of being sisters to each other. Undoubtedly, she took her early family experience and used it to give form and shape to the life of her first companions. Some forty years later she would describe the implications of this relationship in her *Rule*, making it one of the primary formative experiences of life in the community.

LOVE GUIDES FORMATION

How do sisters form each other? Most important, they truly care about themselves and each other, and they express that caring every day by taking care of each other. In language so straightforward it sounds modern, Clare advised her sisters to be "lovers of their own souls and those of their sisters" (*Blessing*, 14). Those lacking adequate self-love are unable to

love others; they are barely able to acknowledge others' existence, much less enter into relationships with them. They lack potential for community. But it is also true that without first being loved by others, no one comes to adequate self-acceptance. At the heart of the mutual bonding of formative community is reciprocity—the greatest commandment realized in the dynamic of daily living.

Clare almost took it for granted that the sisters in the first Poor Clare community would love each other. In her *Rule* she asks, "If a mother loves and nourishes her child according to the flesh, should not a sister love and nourish her sister according to the Spirit even more lovingly?" (8:16). In that last phrase, Clare calls the attention of the sisters to the source of their mutual love; it is not natural attraction but "according to the Spirit." In her *Testament* she speaks of "loving one another with the charity of Christ" (59). Only "in Christ" would mutual love bear fruit and be "shown outwardly in deeds."

Clare was an eminently practical woman. The idea of living together as sisters who love each other was not pure sentiment, much less an expression of sentimentality; it was real and to be realized in the everyday. Caring meant taking care of each other, especially those just beginning religious life and the sick. These are the little ones in any community, and commitment to community must begin with one's most immediate neighbor.

Each novice is entrusted to the care of a sister selected for the purpose of forming her in the ways of the community (*Rule* 2:19). Novices are also to be given special consideration in regard to fasting, lest imprudent zeal damage their health (*Rule* 3:10). Clare's compassionate heart must have realized that a community's openness and flexibility can often be discerned best against its policies for initial formation and its willingness to be stretched to provide for a candidate's very real needs.

Similar concern needs to be shown to the sick. Not only are they to have more food than the healthy, but also more comfortable bedding (*Rule* 8:12). Clare's caring would not permit charity to be diminished just to keep the letter of the *Rule*. In this as in so many other ways, she was ahead of her time, showing more understanding than is evidenced in the rules written for the Clares by Popes Gregory IX and Innocent IV. Perhaps Clare's own years of weakened health sharpened the compassion of her charity. It is noted that she often met the needs of the sick herself and admonished her sisters to "serve the sick as they would want to be served" themselves (*Rule* 8:14). Even the strict silence of the cloister gave way to the demands of charity toward those confined to the infirmary, where talking was always permitted (*Rule* 5:3). Such mutual love could both bring healing to the sick and keep the community healthy.

Clare's servant abbess was given special responsibilities for all the sisters in the community, but particularly for those at the beginnings of their religious life. She interviewed those wishing to enter, "in-forming" them of some of the rigors of community life and the requirements of its poverty. If they still desired the life, she presented them to the whole community, which had the final word on the acceptance of future members with whom they might well spend the rest of their days (*Rule* 2:1–3).

Similarly, the abbess needed to be specially concerned for the sick. The *Process* of Clare's canonization contains repeated references to the many miracles of Clare's own healing love. Sisters came to her in illness, seeking relief. She cheered them and prayed for them; they went away comforted, sometimes completely cured. The simple faith of the sisters is as impressive as Clare's caring.

LOVE BUILDS COMMUNITY

In all of this, we see another of the principles of community formation: the bond of true love grows as it is given expression in simple service. When we meet each other's needs, we are bonded in the mutuality of giving and receiving. We come to know that none of us live by ourselves; we are created to be with and for each other. Experiencing this interdependence forms us into a community. It is a lesson perhaps most easily learned in terms of those who are most needy; it is also a truth we must review over and over again.

Learning to care for others may well begin with the natural bonding of family and friends and continue to grow in a healthy community, yet it must go beyond both of these if it is to be truly of God, mirroring the generosity of divine love, which goes out to all poor people, whoever they are and wherever they may be found. In responding to them, we learn how to give without any expectation of immediate return. We also experience that giving and receiving are not trade-offs but complementary responses. When we give generously, we receive in the very act of giving. And when we receive, we enrich others with the opportunity for generosity.

But formation in community goes beyond this if it is Christian. We must love not only our neighbors as ourselves, but even our enemies. Who were enemies to Clare and her sisters? Not just the Saracens, who at one point threatened to invade the monastery. Loving them was easy; they disappeared. To be formed into a loving community, we must love the "enemy" who lives with us. That is what Clare and her sisters tried to do.

Clare speaks of this difficult aspect of community formation in eminently practical terms. She raises, for example, the question of anger, which is problematic for any group forming community. Clare warned her sisters against allowing a climate of anger to pollute the monastic atmosphere: "The abbess and her sisters . . . should beware not to become angry or disturbed on account of anyone's sin, for anger and disturbance prevent charity in oneself and in others" (*Rule* 9:5). Her apparent concern is not the immediate feeling level but rather the disturbance of heart, which persists and which damages love, both in oneself and in others. And others are disturbed, sometimes because they witness an angry outburst or sense the message of body language, and sometimes because they feel the shock waves that eddy out from the actual incident. Even those who are too distant to know or feel anything are affected; that is the reality of our being joined to each other in the one Body of Christ.

PROBLEMS OCCASION GROWTH

When such problems do occur in community, Clare makes them occasions of grace. The sister at fault is to ask pardon of the other, and then they are to gift each other with mutual acceptance (*Rule* 9:6–9). When this is done sincerely and as promptly as possible, community is bonded even more strongly. The individuals most involved learn a love that goes beyond easy amiability; the whole group is built up in that spirit of reconciliation which grounds all of our relationships with God and with each other.

After forty years of experience of close living together, Clare knew well that grievances are sometimes nursed, that forgiveness is neither always given nor always received, so she built a corrective factor into community formation: being "admonished two or three times by the abbess or other sisters" (*Rule* 9:1,2). So the unpleasant duty of communal correction is not left to the authority figure alone; it is a duty of all in community and a realistic expression of loving one another in truth. Every problem offers an opportunity for grace and growth in holiness.

In addressing that serious issue, Clare exhibited her understanding of the delicately balanced relationship between abbess and sisters. Just as she had resisted the position of abbess during the community's beginnings, so too, in the summarizing document of her *Rule*, she spelled out over and over again that the abbess and the sisters are jointly responsible for community formation. Together they are to accept new candidates, decide on debts to be incurred, be responsible for alms received, and govern the distribution of communal work. What concerns all will be determined by all—another bedrock principle for a group of individuals forming themselves into community.

Ultimately, highest authority in Clare's community rests not in the abbess but in the total group; it is they who select the abbess from among their own number. In present-day democracy this may seem unremarkable, but in Clare's time it could not be taken for granted. An abbess was usually a political pawn; outsiders often did the appointing, and sometimes they chose someone who had not even made profession in the community. Clare legislated against this abuse. She went still further by providing that an abbess who was no longer serving the greater good of the community should be removed from office—by the sisters. It was their community, so theirs was the final authority. The group ultimately authors and forms the community.

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A Quiet Man's Life Models Many Deep Loves

Reverend Thomas J. Morgan, Ed.D.

Matt is 96 years of age and continues to be an eminent and remarkable man. He does not see aging and wrinkles as unpleasant or ugly. He does not show any signs of discomfort or internalized self-criticism with his aging body and declining memory. Matt is a kind and gentle man, caring and welcoming. He is aging gracefully, with a sense of gratitude and acceptance for all that has happened over the years and with a sense of wonderment and hope about what may lie ahead for him. He is unique and special in the eyes of many people.

Even though his sight is failing and his hearing is weakening, Matt does not look for attention; he quietly lives one day at a time. He awaits the daily arrival of the letter carrier, and he always has time for a chat with a friendly neighbor he may meet on his way to do some business at Ward's singing pub and grocery store.

Matt is healthy and never sick a day. His medium-sized, weather-beaten, muscular body is infused with God's creative energies, which he has been soaking up from the soil of the farm for more than nine decades. He often sits in the turf shed, fixing broken tools or sharpening worn tractor-mower blades. He makes old rakes and forks look like new and gets them ready for the haymaking and silage seasons. He can still mix concrete and build walls or make cement stakes that are used to build fencing for cattle and sheep. He has

the skill and the will of any modern-day builder fifty or sixty years younger.

Matt continues to use his self-taught farming and building skills daily. Over the years, he has acquired and perfected these skills, as if by osmosis. Growing up, Matt did not have access to a vocational school or a center for life skills. He simply learned well from good role models—farmers from the older generation, who would say to their sons and apprentices what Jesus said many generations ago to his disciples: "Come and see" (John 1:39). Trial and error was another valuable source of indoctrination and skill training. Obviously, Matt had a great capacity to learn by observing and doing.

WONDERS OF LIFE AND TURF

Matt sees the miracle of life all around the farmyard, with so many animals coming and going, birthing and dying. On the farm, throughout the changing seasons of the year, he is in touch with the mystery of creation in an elemental way that no words could ever describe. The sowing time and the reaping time on the farm speak eloquently to Matt of God's involvement in and closeness to the world. Matt plants and waters the seeds, but he knows that God makes them grow. He knows that he is merely

God's coworker. Daily he sees the world charged with the grandeur of our great Creator. Even with his failing eyes, he sees God hiding in everything and everyone. He can still peer below the surface of things and discover the wonders of God all around him. With his spiritual eye, he can look inside to reflect on the plant and animal life that thrives on the farm; with his human eye, he can look outside at all there is to be seen on the surface. The weather, good or bad, never ceases to remind him that ultimately, everything is in the hands of our heavenly Creator. For more than ninety years, the farm has been the lens that has brought into focus for Matt things about God that can be completely overlooked in other contexts.

He enjoys smoking his pipe as he watches the cattle feed on the silage. The pipe puffs best of all as he rides with Brian on the tractor through the farm. He loves a day in the bog, saving the turf that will be burned in the fireplace that he built seventy years ago. For almost a century, Matt has been cutting, saving, and bringing home the turf. A shed filled with well-seasoned turf is the pride and joy of every farmer when the trees have shed their leaves and the crunchy white frost lies on the ground. A good supply of dried brown turf is a source of much comfort and security as Matt faces the winter months, when the days get shorter and the nights get longer. Nothing warms the long, cold nights like it.

To his grandchildren—Brian, Marie, and Cora—Matt is a hero. For them, he is the embodiment of goodness and love. His constant availability around the farmyard and his acceptance of them is a source of security and a reinforcement of their self-concepts. Wherever he is, Matt communicates kindness and

creates an environment that dispels anxieties, fears and other negative emotions. He is an attractive role model for his grandchildren. They see and hear him pray; they see him go to church on Sunday; they hear his stories about the old times and about their God. His words and actions witness to his faith and his Christian values. Matt's grandchildren see him living a life worthy of imitation—a life of integrity, morality, and honesty. With every word he speaks and every gesture he makes, they know and experience the unconditionality of his love. He models well how to be Christian and how to be prayerful. He proclaims by his life the sacredness of human existence and the holiness of family life.

SUSTENANCE FROM EUCHARIST

To his son, Robbie, and to my sister, Brigid (Robbie's wife), Matt is a model of fidelity, regularity, and commitment. They build on his inspiration and wisdom; they count on his steadfastness and prayerfulness.

Matt never misses mass on Sunday. He dresses up for the occasion like a king, in his new hat and three-piece suit. He loves to be around the altar with the priest to reenact what Jesus did with his disciples at the Last Supper. His weekly time at the local parish church is the wellspring of his life and his activities in the bog and on the farm. The weekly celebration of the Eucharist with the local community of Ballyfa, County Galway, is the culmination of a busy week on the farm, herding the sheep and cattle and bagging Brian's turf for the market.

Weekly Matt gathers with his family and friends to tell his story as reflected in the Jesus story. Living out his rugged life on the farm, he can easily identify with the crushed grapes and grain that become his communion with Jesus. After almost a hundred years of life, he never tires of listening afresh to Christ's words, thanking and praising God: "Take this, all of you, and eat it. This is my body, which will be given up for you." Weekly Matt comes to break bread and share in the bread of life. Weekly he comes to know in a fuller way his rising from the dead. Weekly he opens himself to the ultimate Presence and becomes transformed into the divine nourishment that the Eucharist is for all believers.

For almost a century, the Eucharist has been nourishing food for Matt's spirit. It seems to give him the strength, courage, and openness necessary for the journey of life. Through the Eucharist, his body becomes filled with the goodness and love of God. The holy bread seems to create for him a fresh unity and bond with his family and community. Through the Eucharist, Matt becomes for all a living human sign of God's presence among us. He is keenly aware that the

Christian journey is both human and divine. The Eucharist is heavenly food for this journey. He longs to live fully in the God in whom he has his being.

HAZARDS OF JOURNEY

Matt is a bird-watcher. One day last June, when I was visiting my mother and family in Ireland, he took me to the kitchen window and invited me to look at the swallows, with their short bills, small, weak feet, and deeply forked tails, as they glided out of the turf shed. They were heading out to feed on insects caught on the wing. Matt noted that for some reason, the swallows had not come last year, and he had missed them. This year they came—a bit late, but nevertheless they came—all the way from Africa, to spend the summer in Matt's turf shed, raising their offspring. In a few months they would be migrating all the way back to the west coast of Africa.

Swallows are unusual birds. They are found all over the world except in the polar regions. They love a warm climate, and at the end of each summer, they gracefully fly thousands and thousands of miles to reach a new warm destination. Commiting themselves to the air, they fly over oceans and mountains, with no landmarks for guidance or direction. Without hesitation, Matt's swallows will take off at the end of the summer and confront the dangers of a long and tiring journey to another continent. Many will die along the way—but many more will complete the journey and return once again to Matt's turf shed.

The spiritual journey is all about traveling—and the hazards, difficulties, stress, and grief encountered along the way. Like Matt and his swallows, we have no idea where we are going at times. "We walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:6). We cannot foresee difficulties, pain, disease. Like Matt and his swallows, we surrender ourselves in blind trust to God. We surrender the whole person—body, mind, soul, and spirit—believing that God is always with us and will never abandon us. Matt's swallows are always restless until they reach their destination. Our hearts and Matt's will always be restless until we all rest in God, who is our final destination.

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A Timely Suggestion

It is not too early to think about Christmas 1996 and the gifts you might want to send to your loved ones or friends. If your gift list this year includes someone involved in religious leadership or formation work, pastoral care, spiritual direction, or any other kind of ministry to youth or adults, may we suggest a one-year gift subscription to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT?

The four issues that will be published in 1997 will serve as repeated reminders of your continuing interest in enriching the recipient's ministry as well as his or her life. To order a gift subscription, just send the name(s) and address(es) of the person(s) to whom you want us to mail HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, along with your own name and a check for the subscription price. Before Christmas we will send the recipient(s) an attractive card that announces your gift and conveys your Christmas and New Year's greetings.

You can use the tear-out card included in this issue. We will be delighted to help make your gift-giving just a little easier this Christmas and appreciated all year long.

A Formula for Grieving in a Religious Community

Patrick J. McDonald, L.S.W., and
Claudette M. McDonald, L.S.W.

With a shrug of helplessness, she confessed to being "afraid that religious life as we have known it is dying." The worry lines in her sensitive face bespoke a relentless and unmistakable sadness. Her tears bore poignant witness to how dramatically the nature of religious life was changing.

Other voices rose spontaneously from the assembled group of sisters, who felt the quickening of a variety of emotions embedded within the dense strata of the grieving process: emotions about the closing of their motherhouse, the continued decline of active membership, the lack of new vocations, their order's future, and their difficulties in trusting one another to open up honest dialogue about their destiny.

THE INVITATION

We had been invited by members of the US province of this international order of women religious to help them process their reactions to the variety of changes that confronted them. The urgency of their invitation was stimulated by a watershed event in their history: the closing of their motherhouse, which had served as the center of life and renewal for their order since 1928. The basalt-deep symbolic meaning of the selling off of their property had set off seismic waves of emotion within the community.

The loss of the motherhouse, as well as the large expanse of the US province, made efforts to live a community life immensely more complicated. Living arrangements were decentralized and restructured into smaller clusters. A number of infirm sisters had already been transferred to nursing homes. The provincial council was genuinely concerned about the emotional reactivity of the sisters and the spiritual vitality of the entire province.

The aftershocks associated with the closing continued to jolt the provincial and the provincial council. We suggested that these shock waves could very well be an expression of a genuine grief process commonly associated with organizational change, involving denial, anger, projection, sadness, anxiety, and other disruptive emotions.

In response to the province's request for help, we developed a one-day process model: a psychospiritual experience on grieving. We arrived at the renewal center several months later, armed with our model and ready for a day of interaction with thirty-three members of the community.

In this article, we describe the process model, as well as the facilitative roles we assumed as we presented that model. We also discuss the dynamics we observed in the group as the day progressed. Finally, on the basis of our experience, we offer suggestions

for further refinement of the model. We hope that these reflections will be useful to others working with this model or similar models of organizational change and personal transition.

Our model drew heavily from three major sources: the Emmaus story from the gospel of Luke, the work of William Bridges and some family systems theorists, and our own experiences in dealing with change and transition in families, organizations, and groups. These experiences are often explored through the metaphors of dying, death, and new life.

MORNING SESSION

The day began with the sisters seated randomly, at tables of six, while we addressed them from the front of the conference room. We read the first segment of Luke's account of the Emmaus story and then invited the sisters to explore the content of the story from the early disciples' perspective (disbelief, sadness, reactivity of various kinds, the death of their myths about the mission and person of Jesus).

We suggested that this gospel story not only offers a historical account of the difficulties associated with loss; it also presents a paradigmatic foundation for exploring contemporary change and growth. We asserted that at the core of the early disciples' experience lay the anxiety associated with major change. The methods by which the early church community dealt with its collective anxiety not only reflect our own struggles with ambiguity; they also offer a contemporary context for deeper spiritual transformation.

In an effort to deepen the level of reflection on the gospel reading, we presented an overview of our model of change and transition, adapted from William Bridges's works. We drew a distinction between *change* (external and concrete, as in the downsizing of a business) and *transition* (internal and intangible, as in mourning the loss of a job, a way of life, or a loved one).

We noted that our culture tends to pay a lot of attention to the importance of change but responds little to the more important transition process. We also postulated that when people are confronted with change but do not move through the transition process, they often undermine the very change that they agree upon as beneficial to the organization. Furthermore, they function in impaired ways because they have not brought their work of transition to completion.

These views of change and transition were offered as the centerpiece of our workshop, and we focused on them in a number of ways during the course of the day.

We explained Bridges's three phases of transition in this way:

Phase 1: The ending. A healthy transition begins with a letting go of something. In brief, unless a person lets go of old ways of thinking and doing, a new reality will never come to life.

Phase 2: The neutral zone. This is the time of dealing with or not dealing with the gap that develops after the letting go has taken place. The new has not yet evolved, so the person often describes his or her place as "nowhere."

Phase 3: The beginning. This is the dimension of a transition that is predicated on the first two stages. If the beginning is not based on a healthy ending combined with some time spent in the neutral zone, there can be no real beginning.

As the morning unfolded, we emphasized the importance of beginning a transition at the ending (phase 1) rather than the beginning (phase 3). We postulated that within organizations, it is not so much the changes that people resist as it is the losses, the endings, and the emptiness associated with letting go.

We explained that every change implies a loss that is akin to a death-and-dying experience, and that the feelings of loss represent a very real grief reaction. Rather than speak about the stages of grieving (which can be misleading), we chose to describe William Bridges's signs of grieving:

Denial is the first effort to protect oneself from the pain of loss.

Anger covers a spectrum of reactions, from grumbling to rage. Anger can be directed at a legitimate source or misdirected at whoever might be a "lightning rod" for the discharge. It can take the form of overt expression, foot-dragging, "mistakes," or sabotage.

Bargaining is an effort to hold back the process of change, make a deal, offer unrealistic promises, or make other efforts to postpone the inevitable.

Sadness is the heart of the grieving process. It can be expressed in reactions that range from silence to mad ravings about injustice in the system.

Disorientation is characterized by feelings of being lost and insecure. It can be manifested as confusion and forgetfulness, even in ordinarily disciplined and conscientious people.

Depression consists of persistent feelings of being down, flat, dead, hopeless, and demoralized. Some depressed individuals complain that they feel tired all the time.

Anxiety is a silent or expressed reaction to an unknown or difficult future. Fantasies of impending catastrophe are a common expression.

We presented examples of how these signs of grieving are common in any climate of change, but we focused on the reaction of anxiety as central to our view. We suggested that anxiety resides within the depths of the organizational system, affects each person within it, and acts as raw energy to recycle persistent dysfunctional patterns of interaction. The signs of grieving can dominate the atmosphere of an organization confronted with change and contribute to making it a toxic atmosphere.

Following the presentation of phase 1 of our model, we asked each member of the group to be silently reflective for ten minutes and then to write out her responses to the following questions:

1. What signs of grieving are present in your life now?
2. What changes are the signs related to?
3. How have the signs affected your relationship with other members of the community?

Requesting that the group members write down their reflections independently of group process allowed each sister to relate from an individualized context.

We then invited the sisters to take expressive ownership of what they were feeling by sharing it with the entire group. Their responses came quickly and without pressure, and the deep sharing lasted for two solid hours. The emotions flowed in ever-deepening and resonating waves of honesty. Boxes of tissue were sought and used as the heart of the community opened; hugs confirmed the solidarity the sisters experienced.

As the level of sharing deepened, it became clearer that the closing of the motherhouse had exacerbated a number of complex emotional themes that these women had been wrestling with for years:

- Isolation in religious life;
- Doubts about the future of religious life;
- Disappointment and anger about steps not taken to solve very real problems ten years ago;
- Difficulty in sharing openly as a group because of issues related to trust and mistrust;
- A general sense of meaninglessness, expressed through a variety of psychological and emotional reactions;
- A perceived lack of affirmation of their persons and gifts by some members of the community.

AFTERNOON SESSION

Following a lunch break, we moved the tables out of the room and set up a large circle of chairs, thereby enabling the participants to interact more freely.

The early afternoon sharing continued in a spontaneous mode, and there was ample time for anyone to speak who had not had a chance to do so during the morning session. No personal agenda was too small to be taken seriously. By midafternoon, the momentum slowed, and we began to discuss phase 2 of our model: the neutral zone.

We described it as a psychological state of "being nowhere." The old has died, the new has not yet evolved, and the individual (or social system) is caught in the no-person's land between life as lived and life as idealized for the future.

We made an effort to describe life in the neutral zone—a dangerous and opportune place, and the very core of the transitional process—in language meaningful to the religious community (a dark night, the desert experience). We also explicated the characteristics of the neutral zone in some detail:

- It is a middle ground of nowhere in which the journey from one identity to another takes place.
- It is a psychological place in which the attitudes, values, expectations, self-image, and ways of thinking that have been functional in the past must die before one is ready for life in the present.
- Life in the neutral zone is not just a matter of waiting and confusion. A serious reorientation and redefinition of what life holds must take place.
- The neutral zone is the best place for individual and organizational creativity, renewal, and development to come to life. It is the seedbed for a new beginning.
- It is the place and time in which the old habits that are no longer adaptive to a life situation are extinguished, and more functional adaptive patterns begin to take shape.

We explained to the group that even though no one seems to enjoy life in the neutral zone, a premature escape from it will compromise the change, and a great opportunity for deeper maturity will be lost.

We invited the sisters to share their experiences of life in the neutral zone. They did so without hesitation. Their spontaneity, honesty, and candidness carried the discussion into the late afternoon.

We then presented information from the family systems model. We referred again to the central role of anxiety and postulated that it underlies all family processes. We suggested to the group that an effort to understand the unruly internal processes of a religious community can be pursued within the parameters of the family systems model.

We described the province as a genuine emotional system: a group of individuals who, by virtue of time spent together, are involved in meaningful relationships. We named anxiety as the source of many responses within the system that can "short-circuit" from individual to individual in patterned ways. We suggested that life in the neutral zone can be cumbersome because the patterns of emotional response keep people locked into repetitive, dysfunctional sequences. As Roberta Gilbert writes in her book *Extraordinary Relationships,* "When individuals spend a significant amount of time with one another, they will begin, sooner or later, to trigger each other emotionally, and the phenomenon of 'passing' emotions from one to another, in patterns, can be observed."

We explained to the group that a number of predictable, repetitive patterns can govern the life of an emotional system:

Conflict. Some people become very critical when anxiety is high. They become embroiled in blame for perceived problems. They project their own problems onto other people. They tend to focus more on the other than on the self. They often behave abusively toward other group members.

Distance. Distancers slip into excessive periods of noncommunication as they become more anxious. They may be workaholics or may overuse substances (e.g., alcohol, drugs) or spend excessive time on hobbies. They have a tendency to be quiet when anxiety arises. They chronically talk about things of no substance.

Emotional cutoff. When anxiety escalates, some people terminate all contact and stop communicating with other group members. They often keep the cutoff in place through impenetrable internal mechanisms or physical distance. They blatantly exclude themselves from the life of the system on the basis of dislike.

Underfunctioning. Underfunctioners chronically ask for advice when they really need to think things through independently. They get others to help when help is not required and act out rituals of chronic irresponsibility. When talking is important, they would rather listen. They float aimlessly most of the time, lacking personal goals, or they set goals that they do not implement.

Overfunctioning. Overfunctioners are the chronic advice-givers in an organization. They make a point of advising others when they should be giving advice to themselves. They chronically worry about the outcomes for others and neglect their own lives. They always seem to know what is best for other people. Their high energy output makes them subject to sudden, periodic burnouts.

Triangling. The inherent instability of a dyadic relationship invites triangling—that is, bringing into focus a third party rather than resolving the discomfort in the two-person relationship. Common expressions of triangling include talking about an authority figure (e.g., work supervisor, religious superior, provincial) rather than dealing directly with that person, habitually gossiping about someone who is not present, taking a morbid interest in other people's problems, or victimizing innocent persons by scapegoating them.

As late afternoon approached, we asked the group to reflect again on the interpersonal atmosphere within the province and then to identify ways in which chronic, repetitive, dysfunctional patterns were manifested in their relationships. It took only a short period of time for their explorations to evolve into a discussion of various complicated interactions, some of which had been ongoing for twenty years.

The time for the day's closure drew near as late afternoon wore on toward evening. We described phase 3 of our model, the beginning phase, in Bridges's own words (from his book *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*):

> Beginnings are strange things. People want them to happen but fear them at the same time. After the long and seemingly pointless wandering through the neutral zone, most people are greatly relieved to arrive at whatever Promised Land they've been seeking. Yet beginnings are also scary, for they are the time to make new commitments and actually be the new person that the new situation demands.

We explained that the strangeness of beginnings comes from several sources:

- Beginnings can reactivate old anxieties originally triggered by endings. A new start usually brings with it some new anxiety.
- A new beginning represents a gamble: "This might not work." It stirs up many questions about success.
- New risks resonate with past experiences. They can bring back old memories of failure, old battles with self-esteem. One's response to a new beginning can reflect roles learned in his or her family of origin.
- The neutral zone can be seductively comfortable. One may be reluctant to leave the neutral zone to move into a new and creative expression of life.

A CLOSING RITUAL

The day was brought to a close through the use of ritual, which we described as an essential aspect of the transition process.

An ad hoc committee of sisters had decided to dramatize in song, word, and gesture the entire Emmaus story. That story ritualized the sisters' very real awareness that they, like the earlier disciples, had grown toward a deeper understanding of the death and Resurrection of Jesus. They heard a clear call to grow again through the pain, the suffering, and the difficult transitions of life. They affirmed that the call to more closely identify with the death and Resurrection of Jesus transcends any model, institutional structure, or historically bound definition of service. Ultimately, it is a call to find a more authentic self.

Finally, the sisters broke bread together, like the apostles, whose eyes were opened during their breaking of bread. That ritual symbolized an awakening to the presence of the Risen Lord. The evening ended with all the members of the group granting each other peace.

ROLE OF FACILITATORS

As a husband and wife team, we have worked together in a healing context for twenty years. We found it a pleasant and challenging experience to be in the midst of this group of sisters.

Our previous contact with them had been limited to correspondence and brief telephone conversations until our first meeting with the provincial council on the eve of the workshop. We had spent two hours with the council, discussing the aftershocks of reactivity within the province and how the sisters might interface with us. The members of the provincial council expressed their desire to get the sisters to share their feelings openly, honestly, and effectively in the context of a large group meeting.

We did not reveal the specifics of our model to the council, nor did the council specifically identify to us problematic members of the province. This allowed us to enter the group the next day with a fresh approach to the reality of transition and as little bias as possible about dysfunctional members.

We met the main group of sisters for the first time on Saturday morning as we began to work with our model. We established trust with them rather easily. They listened to our stories about our own struggles with change, death, and transitions, associated with closing our family homes. They responded beautifully to our model, noting that they were especially grateful to break out of the "stages of grieving" mentality, which they found too superficial.

The two of us worked as a team at all times. We supported each other's style of interaction. We had no difficulty being genuinely present to the sisters and communicating our deep concern for their futures. They responded in kind to our initiatives.

The sharing flowed easily in the morning as we both established a nurturing presence. This helped the sisters share feelings with one another that had been blocked for a long time. The first half of the day flowed almost effortlessly. The signs of grieving we discussed offered an understandable framework for identifying and processing the sisters' deep experiences. Their hugs came as spontaneously as their tears.

During the afternoon, as we explored the group's patterned ways of dealing with anxiety, the process became more labored. Resistance became apparent. Ownership of genuine feelings grew more scarce. We expected those responses and knew we were zeroing in on chronic patterns of dysfunction that had become stubbornly embedded in the community system.

We then divided facilitative roles. One of us became more nurturing while the other confronted the denial and the resistances. We referred back to a simple question a number of times: "After we have left your presence, and your life goes back to its routine, what will keep you from falling back into the same old dysfunctional patterns?"

In brief, our facilitative initiatives were an amalgam of the group's evolution, our intuitive sense of where we needed to go with the process, and their level of resistance.

DYNAMICS OF THE DAY

The day yielded a number of benefits for the sisters, judging by the consistent feedback we received from the group members. Many of them were overtly appreciative about how we had helped them talk to one another within a large group context for the first time in years.

Visible reconciliations took place among members. They spontaneously apologized to one another, bonded, and affirmed each other. These actions took place within the formal work of the group, as well as during break times. The sisters developed an awareness about the intricacies of their own interaction as a group.

For some sisters, the emotional reactions to closing down the motherhouse were painful. They expressed great sadness and lamented that their only real home was now gone. For others, the loss was not as acute, and they seemed to have let go quite well.

It was clear to us that the group was affected at every level by difficult questions about religious life

and its future. Their insecurity found a variety of manifestations, including boredom, anger, and a pervasive sense of meaninglessness. The sisters were exploring the fault line that lies between high religious ideals and a stubbornly complicated human condition.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

We learned a great deal about the complexity of the processes we encountered. In retrospect, we offer the following suggestions to those who might want to implement the same model or a similar one within a different context:

Take more time. Our day with the community was sandwiched between two others days of problem-solving, planning, and spiritual exercises. The meals and schedule had already been set by the retreat center. Having a three-day open agenda with which to be creative would have allowed a deeper and more thorough exploration of the many themes that surfaced. Likewise, we could have pursued in greater depth the long-term dysfunctional patterns that were part of the province's experience in the neutral zone.

Begin the facilitation work with a stronger consensus about the goals of the entire group. That would imply meeting with all members of the group before actually implementing the model. Special care should be taken to confirm that all desire the same goals. We discovered some gaps in the sisters' perceptions of what was ailing the community and did our best to bridge them, but we needed a better focus on what issues the entire group wanted to explore, process, and bring to closure. We also discovered that the group members were in many different places within the same neutral zone. It is self-evident that if a group is going to willingly move toward a resolution of deep undercurrents of unrest, a clear consensus is needed to move the entire group in a common direction. It would take several hours of hard work to reach such a consensus.

Make use of ritual more extensively. The use of ritual is critical in the healing process, but ritual must not supersede honest efforts at taking ownership of behavior, engaging in candid dialogue with community members, and dealing straightforwardly with the problems of a common life. To ritualize too quickly and without serious problem solving at all levels is to foster denial. An ill-timed ritual can actually increase the gap between life as lived and life as idealized. More time should be spent on theme-focused rituals of healing and reconciliation, life and resurrection.

We found the effort to help the sisters process their reactions to the closing of the motherhouse both challenging and rewarding. The group became a loving community to us—two outsiders—and enriched our lives. The group's psychospiritual experience turned out to be a good one. As in all structured human experiences, some group members were touched deeply by the process, whereas others were not. Our model could be expanded and made more functional with more work.

The sisters ended the evening's closing ritual by extending their hands over us in blessing and singing their order's song to us. We came away knowing that the lives of all who had met that day had been enriched.

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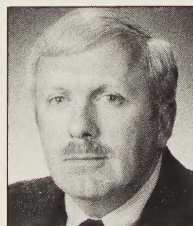
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Homily for a Beloved Mother

In a recent editorial (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Fall 1994), Father James Gill asked readers to submit for publication the stories of persons they have loved and admired, so that those individuals' spirit of growth might give us direction as we reflect on our humanity.

The following is the wake homily that I preached in Des Moines, Iowa, at my mother's funeral. I offer it to the readers of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT as a reminder of the goodness of all parents, living and deceased, as gifts from the Lord.

Yesterday, after I drove here to Saint Peter's Church to plan Mom's funeral ceremonies for tonight and tomorrow, I drove to the area of East 29th and Walnut, where my brother and I grew up. I couldn't help but remember the all-too-snug home in which we lived. I recalled the sound of Mom's sometimes crisp bark—"Get up or you'll miss the bus for school," or "Don't bang that door so hard, or you'll pay for another one." I thought of the clean, pressed white shirts, changed daily, that made our school uniforms look neat; the Saturday-morning pancakes; earning grade-school tuition money by parking cars in the heat of August, during the Iowa State Fair.

When we were older, Mom took a second job to help out at home. Saturdays were reserved for the rituals of housecleaning, laundry, ironing, grocery shopping, and yard work, which we were forced to take part in. Sunday was a day of no servile work, and we didn't dare turn on the radio or look at the paper until we came home from Sunday mass. I remember asking Mom for money when Dad wouldn't give it to me. I can see her proud face at our first sacrament celebrations, graduations, and commitments to marriage and priestly ministry. Sundays, birthdays, and holidays were filled with special foods; Mom loved entertaining company and offering hospitality. She was a mother in every sense of the word in good times, and ever-faithful when her sons were in bad times.

It is that call to the feminine, Sophia—that inner wisdom, mother's love, Mom's nurturing—that we remember tonight as we celebrate the feast of the birth of Mary, Mother of Jesus. Paul tells us today, "We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who have been called according to his desire" (Rom. 8:28). Mary was called at her birth to play a vital role in salvation history. Her titles—Mother of Mercy, Seat of Wisdom, Queen of Peace—all describe feminine attributes of God and serve as reminders that all of us are born to bring Jesus to others, as Mary did, and as Agnes brought Jesus into our lives through her motherly care. Mary's "yes" to the Lord gave her a share in his life, passion, and death, and led to her Resurrection joy with him. We pray tonight that Agnes Bertogli, our mother, sister, grandmother, and friend, rest in the Lord's risen presence forever.

Mom's last day on earth found her in and out of confusion. She was constantly praying and saying over and over, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, now and at the hour of our death," followed by a repetitious "amen, amen, amen." Like Mary's "yes" to God, may Mom's "amen" ("so be it"), which ushered her into eternal life, help us believe of the past week's events that "all this happened to fulfill what the Lord God said" (Matt. 1:22). Amen.

—**Reverend John O. Bertogli**
Des Moines, Iowa

BOOK REVIEWS

Culture of Recovery, Culture of Denial: Alcoholism Among Men and Women Religious by Eleace King, I.H.M., and Jim Castelli. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, 1995. 165 pp. $19.95.

The title of this book sums up the findings of a research project on alcoholic religious, both male and female. The investigators found that the vast majority of alcoholic religious who have sought treatment are "sober, happy and productive . . . their attitude is positive and they have a positive view of religious life. In most cases their communities played an integral role in helping them obtain and maintain sobriety." That culture of recovery is the good news.

The study also uncovered some bad news, however: a culture of denial continues to thrive. For instance, 8 percent of male and 40 percent of female major superiors claim that none of their communities' members are alcoholic. This suggests that major superiors may be seriously underestimating the degree to which alcoholism is a problem in their communities. There also appears to be massive denial or lack of concern within religious communities that have alcoholic members. Alcoholics in the general population report that others expressed concern about their drinking a year before they themselves were concerned. In contrast, alcoholic religious report that they were worried about their drinking for a full year before others in their congregations expressed concern.

I recommend this book to anyone involved in leadership or personnel work in a religious congregation. It offers much useful information, as well as data that challenge some long-held assumptions about treatment. Among the authors' encouraging findings:

90 percent of alcoholics who had residential treatment were satisfied with their treatment; less than 20 percent had to return to treatment centers. Also, it is dramatically clear that Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a godsend to those suffering from the disease of alcoholism. But there are also some unsettling and challenging findings. Relapse appears to be higher among religious than in the general population, and loneliness is identified as a probable factor. Also, most congregations have not updated their policies on alcoholism in over twenty years.

Some of the reported findings will stir debate. Only 30 percent of the respondents attained sobriety by participation in AA alone, without benefit of a residential treatment center. Some of the data raise questions about such facilities, some of which focus primarily on the alcoholism and may not effectively deal with other addictive behaviors or more serious personality disorders. One of the more provocative findings is that "treatment was much longer in treatment programs that treat only religious than those that treat the general public." The authors raise the question of whether the length of treatment is determined more by the philosophy of the program than by the severity of the alcoholism. Another finding that will stir debate is the relationship between the length of a program and a satisfactory outcome. As the authors state, "These findings illustrate the positive impact of AA on alcoholic religious and raise questions about the wisdom of lengthy residential treatment."

Through its research and the publication of this book, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate has provided a magnificent service for religious, especially those afflicted with alcoholism and those in leadership in religious congregations. I have one concern, however: I fear that the findings that challenge some existing myths may be discarded without allowing for necessary debate and further research.

—**Loughlan Sofield, S.T.**

Socrates is credited with saying, "The unexamined life is not worth living." The process of self-scrutiny is at best a timid activity, especially when one must honestly address personal weaknesses. For courageous individuals who engage in such examination, the operative assumption is that authentic growth and integration occur by acknowledging and transforming the shadow in one's personality.

Saint Paul sums up this paradoxical quest for wholeness in 2 Corinthians 12:10: "For when I am weak, then I am strong." Scripture reminds us that our embarrassing weaknesses become the bright windows of access for both God and neighbor. Yet no matter how often we reflect upon such an invitation for communal and personal growth, engaging in this risk-taking, countercultural process runs contrary to our instincts. The dominant, unwritten rule for our exchanges is to accentuate our strengths, cleverly keeping imperfections camouflaged. As ministers, spiritual directors, marriage counselors, educators, or psychological care providers, what strategies do we employ to help others address their areas of weakness? Is this topic ever faced?

David Edman has written a valuable, compact, and practical book. *Your Weaknesses Are Your Strengths* examines the theological and psychological foundations for confronting one's human frailties as a means of attaining wholeness. Much like the descent journey of Dante, which was the prerequisite to his eventual ascent, Edman argues, our acknowledgment of our weaknesses is the prerequisite to the full utilization of our strengths.

Edman delineates the four key principles that form the basis of his Personal Weakness Inventory: "Your Weaknesses Are Your Strengths," "Your Strengths Are Your Weaknesses," "Others Identify You and Deal with You on the Basis of Your Weaknesses, Not Your Strengths," and "God Knows Us and Deals with Us on the Basis of Our Weaknesses, Not Our Strengths." He illustrates each of these axioms with literary, religious, and behavioral examples.

I found the chapter on the social implications of personal weaknesses and strengths to be most helpful. In it, Edman observes that "Ordinarily, the rite of encounter follows an instinctual pattern by which our strengths are made to confront the discerned weaknesses of others. At the same time—and the point is crucial—we attempt to *conceal* personal weaknesses and, further, *discount* what seem to us the potential strengths of the one being encountered." In effect, we wear masks, assume competitive postures, and create distances in relationships. According to Edman, the theological and interpersonal challenge that forms the foundation of our relationship with God and community is realized in our weakness. 1 Corinthians 1:22–29, which examines the weakness of God, serves as the scriptural model that reveals God's frailty. Jesus' preferential option for the powerless and impoverished serves as the relational bridge for disclosure, healing, and intimacy. As weakness allows space for our vulnerability with God to occur, our own shared weakness opens the doorway for human friendship and unity.

The methodology of the handbook resides in the author's systematic, reflective cataloging and transforming of personal weaknesses. In order to undertake effectively Edman's inventory, which consists of four stages (listing, delineation, processing, and transformation), a six-week commitment is essential. Edman's method is similar to the consciousness examination in Ignatian discernment, which disposes the individual to metanoia and change of heart. *Your Weaknesses Are Your Strengths* attractively reminds us that the amazing grace of God is present especially when we cultivate those unaddressed areas of our person patiently requesting conversion.

—John P. Mossi, S.J., D.Min.